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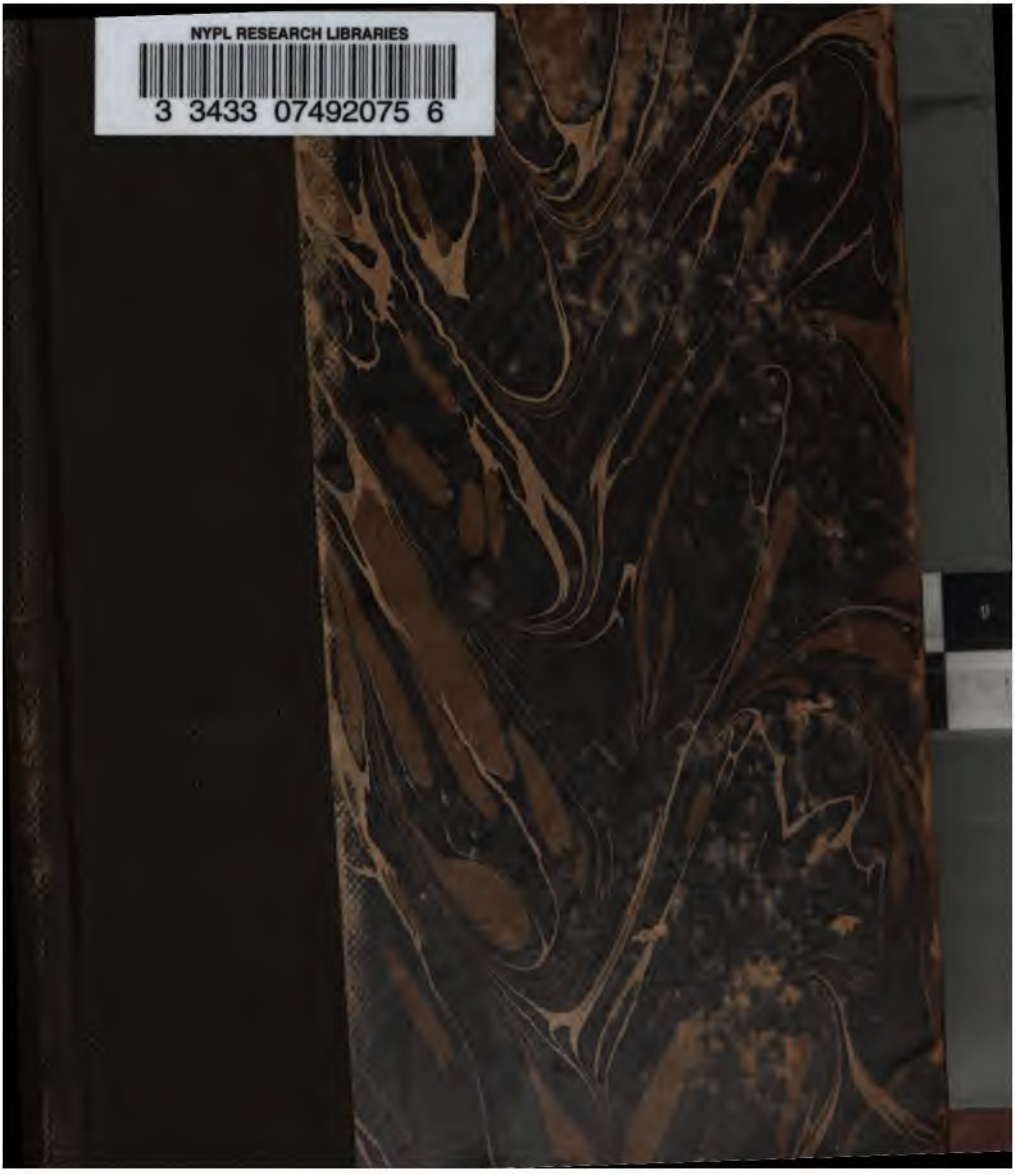
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BY

RICHARD BAGOT.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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1906

THE JUST AND THE UNJUST.

CHAPTER I.

"I WONDER," said Lady Heversham, "whether God has any sense of humour."

It was Sunday morning, and a certain number of the guests staying at Heversham had duly attended church. The sermon had been long, and during its course the preacher had betrayed an extraordinary knowledge of the innermost thoughts of the Deity. He was, to judge by his words, and the assurance with which he delivered them, on terms of considerable intimacy with each person of the Trinity, and had not hesitated to describe their individual impressions and conduct with an authority which only a close acquaintanceship could warrant.

Lord and Lady Heversham were spending Whitsuntide in their north-country home, and had brought down a small party of friends with them. Easter that year had been late, and consequently the country was in the full triumph of its spring beauty. Through the open windows of the church, which stood in the grounds not a hundred yards away from the house at Heversham, came the scent of the hawthorn blossom, the strains of a happy chorus of birds, and the call of the cuckoos answering each other from the surrounding woods. The lusty joy of Nature without mocked at the words of the preacher within the walls dedicated by man to Nature's God, and more than one of the congregation had felt the force of the contradiction which the sweet spring breeze, pregnant with the breath of Life and Love, carried with it into the little church. The vicar had spent some forty minutes in depicting God as he knew him, and a very disagreeable picture of a being at once petty and vindictive it was. God's own creatures without, however, knew him better. He had given them his divine commission to speak to those who had ears to

hear and a heart to understand, and they were speaking of Him on that May morning with all their souls and with all their strength.

The sermon had come to an end at last; and Lady Heversham and her guests were walking through the churchyard, whence an old gateway led immediately into the gardens surrounding the house.

Muriel Heversham stood still for a moment or two, letting her gaze wander over the beautiful landscape of hill and woodland, and drinking in the soft, scented air with a little sigh of contentment and relief.

"What a very odd remark!" exclaimed her younger sister. "It sounds—"

"Irreverent? No, I assure you I do not mean to be irreverent; quite the reverse," answered Lady Heversham. "When I hear certain definitions of the Deity I cannot help wondering whether, as I say, he has any sense of humour. If he has, the whole thing must seem intensely funny."

"Like overhearing oneself discussed in the servants' hall," said her sister.

Lady Heversham laughed slightly. "Something like it, Violet," she replied, "only I'm afraid that the servants know more about us than we do about God."

"If it comes to that, I did hear myself discussed by the servants on one occasion," said Violet Goring, pensively.

"What did they say of you, Miss Goring?" asked Mr. Fortescue, an old gentleman of seventy with the face and the figure which many men his junior by twenty years envied, and, envying, said disagreeable things.

"They said that I had a devil of a temper," replied Miss Goring.

"Exactly what Mr. Fletcher has been implying of God for the last forty minutes," said Lady Heversham, "though no doubt your maid knows a great deal more about your temper than our vicar, Mr. Fletcher, knows of God's.

"It is horrible!" she continued with a little shudder. "Such a description of the Almighty as we have been listening to this morning is enough to

turn one into a pagan and make one avoid going to church."

"And Man said: Come, let us make God in our image," said Mr. Fortescue as he lit a cigarette.

"Can't you get rid of your local theologian, Muriel?" asked her sister.

"Why, no, that is just what we can't do," replied Lady Heversham; "if he would only rob the offertory, or do something scandalous, we might, perhaps —but he won't!"

"I shouldn't think that Heversham was much affected by his doctrines," said Mr. Fortescue, with a little wave of his hand towards his host, who was slowly sauntering along the terrace in front of the house with a cigar in his mouth.

"Heversham is one of those people who rarely go to church themselves, but are angry if others don't go there," said Lady Heversham, smilingly. "He is annoyed with Mr. Fletcher because his intolerably dull services and damnatory sermons empty the village church. He says it's hard on the keepers."

"On the keepers?"

"Of course! The lads and young men, instead of going to church on Sundays, go into the coverts. I think that they are quite right; but Heversham doesn't like it, and says that Fletcher's Calvinistic doctrines play—well—are very bad for his pheasants."

By this time the little party of church-goers had reached the end of the terrace, and Lord Heversham strolled towards them.

He was a tall, good-looking man, and bore the unmistakable mark of high-breeding about him; for the Lesters of Heversham were not of the nobility of yesterday, but had borne a great name in the north of England for centuries, during which time they had been the possessors of many broad acres of moorland and valley, fell and dale in Westmoreland and Lancashire.

The first impression that Lord and Lady Heversham made upon anyone seeing them together was that there was evidently a great disparity of age between them. It was not a case of May and December, but rather one of October and June. Lord Heversham was by no means an old man; he was, as

a matter of fact, barely fifty, and had succeeded to the family honours and estates and married a wife but a year previous to this Whitsunday morning.

Hugh Lester had been the youngest of three brothers, and his chances of becoming Lord Heversham and enjoying a rent-roll of nearly forty thousand a year had been so remote that he had never entered into the calculations of the mothers and daughters of London Society. When it became generally known in the world that the late Lord Heversham, Hugh Lester's eldest brother, would have no children, the second brother, Edward, had naturally been regarded as the one in the family to whom it would be well to be civil. He was young, unmarried, and in a Lancer regiment, but, unfortunately, not immediately available, for his regiment was in India. When the news of his death, resulting from an accident at polo, arrived, the London season was just beginning. Three weeks afterwards, Hugh received an unusual number of invitations to dinner, some of which, with a nice calculation regarding the limits of the family mourning, were for a considerable length of time ahead.

Hugh Lester, however, had never been what is called a marrying man. Possessed of an income which was amply sufficient for one, he had never seen any reason to reduce its possibilities by putting himself under any legal obligation to share it with a second person. As a boy he had been delicate, and this delicacy had debarred him from going to Eton, as the boys of his family had done for many generations, and it had also prevented him from entering diplomacy, which had been the profession that he himself had at one time wished to adopt.

He had been barely two and twenty when his father died, and very shortly after the latter's death he lost his mother also. Lady Heversham had money of her own, which was settled upon her younger children, so that as quite a young man Hugh had found himself in the enjoyment of an income which amounted altogether to some fifteen hundred pounds a year. This was not a very large sum, certainly, but he had no particularly extravagant tastes; perhaps the only good thing resulting from the delicacy of his earlier years was that it had prevented him

from acquiring them at college, or as a third Secretary in one of Her Majesty's embassies in a foreign capital. In most other ways, his weakliness had been a great drawback to him, if only because, in the important years of a boy's life, from the time he is fifteen years of age until he is twenty, he had been thrown, as it were, too much upon himself; and when he should have been associating with others of his own age there were long months when he was left either in the company of very much older people than himself or in his own, to live with his own thoughts. Now the thoughts of a boy of sixteen to twenty years of age are not good things with which to be always alone. Even the best of them are the better for being shared by others; while the worst of them are apt to reassert themselves at critical moments in after life, and their old influence is strong. The consequence was that Hugh Lester grew up into a reserved man, who had never been in the habit of taking the world in general into his confidences. He was, in short, difficult to know, but the few people who knew him well, or whom he allowed to think that they did,

liked him, and, though never very popular, he had many friends.

Sensuous by nature, he had too delicate a perception of the delights of the senses to be a sensualist. They were as plants to be cultivated and trained with discretion, but not to be allowed to run to seed and so wear themselves out. If the term had not been so misused and misapplied as to have become almost an offensive expression, Hugh Lester might have been with justice called æsthetic. He possessed that subtle intuition of the true powers of the senses which is the genuine æstheticism—the æstheticism of Kant, and of St. Francis of Assisi, with which the modern vagaries of minds diseased have nothing in common.

When his second brother met with his death in India, Hugh was momentarily roused from the life with which for twenty years and more he had taken infinite pains to surround himself. As the modern so-called æsthete expends much labour and thought on his material surroundings, and endeavours to make for himself a setting which he considers to be worthy of his precious individuality, so Hugh had, perhaps

unconsciously, made for himself a life which completely satisfied his sensuous nature. It was a life from which everything disagreeable was systematically expelled, every jarring note artistically reduced to harmony. But the moulder of this life was emphatically a man, and no mere collection of ill-regulated nerves covered by a human body. The key-note of the pseudo-æstheticism is personal vanity; that of the true is rather the pride of mastery over the senses, and the determination to acquire the capacity for employing them as a means to promote the highest enjoyment of life.

The ruling spirit of Hugh Lester's character was an extreme fastidiousness, and it is perhaps this very quality which prevents the sensuous nature from drifting into sensuality. To certain natures the physical disgust at the vulgar surroundings of vice is far stronger than the moral, and even where vice is covered with all the allurements of refinement the truly æsthetic nature quickly penetrates the disguise. Life for the genuine æsthetic must ring true as a well-led orchestra, in which no single instrument is out of tune or time.

The very victory and triumph of pure æstheticism is arrived at when the æsthetic has learned how to treat the discords of life as component parts of its harmony; when its ironies become no longer ironies, but the necessary accidents of the great theme of existence.

Hugh Lester had certainly never arrived at this point. There are few, indeed, who do, unless it be some contemplative monk in his monastery, bent upon sacrificing the present state of his life to follow an ideal. Perhaps this latter is the truest disciple of æstheticism that the world knows; and a complete self-absorption in the beautiful is not the only pagan doctrine which the Church has moulded and fashioned in order at once to gratify human desires and advance her own dominion over the minds of men.

Probably no one ever experienced so little pleasure in succeeding to an earldom and forty thousand a year as did Hugh Lester. On the death of his second brother, he realised with a feeling little short of dismay that he was heir presumptive to the Lester title and estates. It had always been a kind of understood thing among the brothers, so soon as it be-

came evident that Lady Heversham would have no children, that Edward, the next heir, should marry. At the time of his sudden death he had actually been on the point of sending in his papers and returning to England with this view, urged thereto by his eldest brother. Lord Heversham was greatly distressed at the thought of the family honours and estates passing away from the eldest branch, the more so because, should neither of his brothers have a son, both the title and entailed properties would devolve upon a distant cousin of no very reputable character, who had married a lady whose acquaintance he had made —without an introduction—in the Brompton Road.

Until the news of Edward's fatal accident at polo arrived, Hugh had never troubled his head about the succession to the family estates, knowing very well that his second brother, when he returned from India, would have all the marriageable daughters of London society to choose from. The latter's unexpected death, however, brought him face to face with a difficulty upon which he had never calculated, or had only regarded as a contingency so remote as to

warrant its being numbered among the disagreeable things of life—to be instantly dismissed from the mind.

It was natural that Lord Heversham should have done his utmost to impress upon his youngest and only remaining brother that it was the latter's solemn duty by his family to marry without delay. He was no longer a young man, being older by a good many years than either of his brothers, and his life, moreover, was not a good one, for he had suffered for some time from an affection of the heart.

Four years had elapsed since Edward Lester's death, and still Hugh showed no signs of marrying, and Lord Heversham already saw visions of the disreputable cousin reigning at Heversham, and the Brompton Road lady, bedecked with the Lester family jewels, sitting in the place of his childless wife.

Hugh seldom came to Heversham. His brother's house bored him, and though the two were good friends enough, they had no tastes in common. Since he had become the heir to the place it was more than ever distasteful to him to stay there, for Lord Heversham would take him walks about the property

in the course of which he would return over and over again to the one subject which weighed upon his mind. The thinning of a plantation, or the renovation of a fence, would invariably serve as an object-lesson, and Lord Heversham would remark with a sigh on the utter futility of improving a place which in a few years' time must pass out of the family—for he refused to recognise the far-off cousin as a Lester.

There are few things more tiresome in this world than being shown improvements in other people's properties, and most of us have groaned in the spirit while our host has taken us round his young plantations, his new heating apparatus, or his home farm, in despite of a possible desire on our part to drive the Berkshire pigs into the plantations, and the shorthorn bull, bred on the premises, into the hot-houses. Up to the time of his brother Edward's death Hugh had occasionally submitted to the trial of being shown the most recent improvements at Heversham, and had even succeeded in feigning a certain degree of interest in them. After that event, however, he felt

that a more direct and personal concern was required of him, and his visits to his old home became rare and of short duration.

The truth was that Hugh Lester, in his systematic endeavours to convert life into a kind of pleasure trip through the actual phase of his existence, had succeeded to a degree which even he himself had never thought attainable. This unusual result had been brought about by the combination of circumstances. A certain proportion of his success was due to the accidents of his possessing a comfortable income, and, since he had outgrown the delicacy of his earlier years, extremely good health. Both these accidents are of supreme importance to the realisation of the æsthetic dream, when the dreamer is content to take his stand upon that lower level of æstheticism, which suffices to all but the loftiest spirits.

With these latter Hugh had nothing to do, beyond that he was conscious sometimes of a shadowy and fleeting intuition that the level he had chosen *was* a low one, and that his nature had been capable of higher things.

If he had been a man religiously inclined he would have prided himself upon the possession of a strong sense of morality. There are not a few persons in the world who are under the impression that they are strictly moral, but who, did they care to analyse their state, would discover that it was not morality at all which kept their lives somewhat cleaner than their neighbour's, but an innate dread of the possibly unpleasant or sordid entering into their existence as a consequence of yielding to their passions—a spark of the true æsthetic principle, in short, which not unfrequently passes muster as moral rectitude.

Hugh, however, was not a religious man, and the idea of curbing his passions for morality's sake never occurred to him. As a younger man he had often felt angry with himself, and almost ashamed, that he was unable to find the same pleasure in the ordinary amusements and follies of life which other young men of his age experienced; but it spoke well for his tact and natural geniality of disposition that he had always contrived to be fairly popular even with those

whose tastes and pursuits in life completely differed from his own. He had an easy way, which quite disarmed criticism, of good-naturedly deploring the fact that certain things bored him, and very few of his friends and acquaintances had sufficient insight into his character to be aware that when he said that things bored him the truth was that they disgusted him. Of this, perhaps, he was himself but dimly conscious. The fact was that during Hugh's youth his quickness to perceive the unbeautiful endued him with a fastidiousness which was a more powerful safeguard against the dangers that beset the path of a young fellow with a good income and plenty of spare time than either principles or morality would have afforded. Principles and morality occasionally fail at the critical moment, and they would most assuredly have failed Hugh had he ever pretended to possess them in any remarkable degree.

When Lord Heversham, in the course of those walks about the park and grounds of Heversham which his brother and heir so much dreaded, returned again and again to the subject of the necessity of

Hugh's marriage, he had good reasons for being anxious on the matter. There had never been much confidence between the brothers; but Lord Heversham knew what was very generally known by the world at large, namely, that Hugh had maintained for some years past a *liaison* with a lady which showed no signs of wearing itself out. He had never questioned his brother on the subject, nor indeed had it ever specially interested him. He had often heard it said by men who professed to know that Hugh would probably never marry. When he heard the same thing said by women, however, he began to think that there might be something in it, and then he had asked the reason. Even when he had been told, Lord Heversham did not see any particular necessity to trouble himself about the matter. If Hugh chose to live with the lady, why should he not do so? The Lesters had never been very strict disciplinarians in their domestic morality, and, as long as there was no scandal and Hugh was satisfied, he felt that it would be extremely indiscreet on his part to interfere. As a matter of fact, there was not the slightest scandal,

and Hugh Lester was evidently quite contented. He had never, moreover, asked his brother for a penny, from which Lord Heversham gathered that the *ménage* was not an extravagant one, and this in itself was a strong argument in favour of letting it alone. Lord Heversham had made his inquiries concerning his brother's mistress cautiously and discreetly, and when he had ascertained that there was no husband in the background, and that she had borne Hugh no children, he had concerned himself no more in the matter. As he was informed that she was not only remarkably good-looking, but also to all appearances a lady by breeding and education, he had come to the conclusion that his youngest brother probably knew very well what he was about.

When, however, Edward Lester's fatal accident made Hugh his heir, Lord Heversham had regarded the matter in a very different light. The length of time during which this *liaison* had lasted, and the absence of anything at all likely to cause disturbances and consequent rupture between his brother and the lady, now caused Lord Heversham very serious un-

easiness. He dreaded that Hugh might marry her. If he did, it would mean that the detested distant cousin would after all become the head of the Lester family. When Lord Heversham thought of this he almost wished that his brother had a few illegitimate children by his mistress. At anyrate there would be then some hope in the matter, for there would be nothing to prevent him from marrying the woman and having a son who would be a legal heir; and Lord Heversham knew his world well enough to feel sure that, if his brother did marry the lady with whom he had lived so long, as Lord and Lady Heversham, very little tact and commonsense on their part would be necessary to cause society to forget any past irregularities. A year or two of unostentatious domestic life, a discreet civility to the local clergy, and particularly to the Bishop of the diocese, judicious presents of game to the gentry, and flannel petticoats to the poor,—all these little things worked wonders in the country if performed in a spirit which hit off the *via media* between patronage and flattery. As for the London world, Lord Heversham calculated

that two years would be more than sufficient to break down any little feeling that it might have against receiving Hugh Lester's former mistress as Countess of Heversham. All that would be necessary would be to gain the concurrence of the right people at the commencement. He knew that he was leaving his estates in excellent order, and that whenever Hugh succeeded to them he would be a very rich man. All these speculations, however, were so much waste of time and thought. The woman had had no children during the eight or ten years she had lived with his brother, and were the latter to marry her it would certainly not mend matters, but only make them still more hopeless.

Lord Heversham was neither a clever nor a determined man, and he was, moreover, a little afraid of his youngest brother, whose character he did not in the least understand, but whom he felt to be his superior both in wit and intelligence. It was shyness of Hugh which had made him shrink from ever discussing with him openly the question which he had so much at heart. Hence the pointed allusions

which he would make during their rare walks together. Lord Heversham, as it were, intrenched himself behind his pigs,—which he did understand,—and fired off desultory shots at his brother, whom he did not.

"If you don't marry," he had once said to him plaintively, as they went through the home farm together, "I shall give up all this stock-breeding. The Heversham short-horns and the Heversham pigs are famous, you know,—but it's no good keeping this sort of thing up if the whole place is going away to a damned fellow who wouldn't know the difference between the two."

At last the day came when Lord Heversham did speak out, but it was Death which gave him courage. Hugh had always evaded the question, or put him off with vague assurances that some day it would be all right and that he would marry in time. But the years passed, and Lord Heversham knew that his brother was still tranquilly leading the life he had led for so long, and looked in vain for any sign that he intended to alter it.

Lady Heversham, for many years an invalid, had,

since her failure to present her husband with any children, become a mere nonentity, and her death, which occurred shortly after that of Edward Lester, did not materially affect the situation in the Lester family. Had she died a few years sooner, her husband would almost certainly have married again immediately. At the time of her death, however, Lord Heversham himself was in very indifferent health, and had already been seriously ill on one occasion from his heart affection.

Eighteen months after his sister-in-law's death, Hugh Lester was summoned hastily to Heversham to find his brother dying from the disease which had so long threatened his life, and which had been aggravated by a cold contracted on the Westmoreland moors during a wet day's grouse-driving late in September, when cold autumn mists swept over the hill-tops, chilling the guns as they waited behind their butts for the birds to be driven past them.

At the conclusion of the last drive Lord Heversham had staggered, and fallen into the arms of his loader as they were leaving the butt to rejoin the

other guns. It was during the few days in which he had rallied that he had several conversations with his brother on the subject of the latter's imminent succession to the family honours and possessions, and, with the shadow of death already upon him, he who was about to resign his stewardship of them spoke his mind freely.

Hugh had trusted to Heversham living many more years, although he knew that his heart was affected, and in the meantime he had quietly pursued "the even tenor of his way,"—a man untrammelled by any of the cares of matrimony, yet secure in the companionship of a woman who satisfied all his desires, not only materially but also spiritually.

He had never been quite sure as to how much his brother knew of his affairs, but he had not long sat by his bedside before he discovered that Lord Heversham knew considerably more than he had ever imagined.

In a few simple words his brother had told him all that he had heard,—all that he feared, and all that he hoped.

The shyness and irresolution which had been part of Lord Heversham's character, and which had been particularly apparent in his manner towards the brother with whom he was conscious of being completely out of sympathy, had disappeared, and in their place the quiet authority of the head of the family had asserted itself. Hugh hardly recognised his eldest brother in the man who lay on his death-bed pointing out to him the duties which were before him.

With all his shyness of manner Lord Heversham was a very proud man; he had not six centuries of good blood running in his veins for nothing, and his pride in his family and in his name was the legitimate pride of a man who knew that he represented an ancient race which had served its country well and honourably.

Something of this pride Lord Heversham succeeded in communicating to his brother, and Hugh, moreover, had been touched by the tenderness and feeling he displayed as well as consideration for his own difficulties.

He had not taken advantage of the fact that he

was upon his death-bed to moralise upon his brother's position.

"It's rough upon you, Hugh," he had said at the conclusion of their first interview, in which he had told his brother plainly that the latter had now but one duty, namely, to marry and have children, and that everything else must be sacrificed to this duty.

"It's rough upon you," he had repeated, "but you will have plenty of compensation. I am sorry for —for the lady; it's very hard upon her, if she's all that you say."

"And upon the woman whom I shall have to marry," Hugh had replied, with a short, unpleasant laugh.

Lord Heversham had glanced at him for a moment, and then his gaze wandered to the windows of the bedroom and out to where, beyond the grey walls and towers of the old house, the woods stretched away, gorgeous in their autumn clothing of green and gold, till they merged themselves in the purple distances of the rugged fells which looked down on Windermere.

"The woman you marry will have her compensations also!" he replied, dryly, after a pause, in answer to his brother's last remark, while his eyes had a wistful expression in them as they dwelt lovingly upon the beautiful landscape of which he owned every acre and was about to leave for ever.

"The old place is worth some sacrifice, Hugh," he added, "and it has fallen upon you to make it" —and Hugh Lester had nodded a silent assent.

Lord Heversham had lingered for a few days, and then the end came, but not before he had exacted a solemn promise from his brother and heir that the latter would marry a woman who might bear him children, and who should have an unquestioned right to take that place in the world to which as his wife she would be entitled.

And so Lord Heversham had died content, for he knew that his brother would keep his word, though he had carefully abstained from asking him any embarrassing questions as to how he was going to settle matters with the lady who had been for so long a time his mistress.

That Hugh had kept the promise which he had made to his dying brother the presence of the beautiful woman who came towards him with some of his guests on that Whitsuntide morning was a proof. Muriel Heversham was indisputably a very beautiful woman, and she had burst upon the world after her marriage as a revelation, and by no means a pleasant one, to many who had tried hard to occupy her place.

Society, which had always kept its eye upon Hugh Lester after the death of his second brother, had become absolutely unremitting in its attentions to him since he had become Earl of Heversham. His engagement to a young lady who had already seen some seasons had been actually announced in several of the London papers, only to be contradicted indignantly next day in the same journals. Ill-natured people said that the announcement and its contradiction proceeded from the same source, and that editors of newspapers did not regard the trick in the light of a novelty.

The most experienced and far-seeing of the pursuers of man in the London world had to confess

themselves defeated when one April morning, at the very commencement of the London season, a short paragraph appeared simultaneously in the "Times" and the "Morning Post" to the effect that a marriage had been arranged, and would take place immediately, between the Earl of Heversham and Muriel, eldest surviving daughter of the late Colonel Maitland-Goring and Mrs. Goring.

Nobody had ever seen Miss Goring, or had ever heard of her, but a few people remembered Colonel Goring. Of these the majority were to be found in the United Service Club, whence some particulars of the Goring family gradually filtered through the drawing-rooms of Belgravia and Mayfair. There was nothing to be said against the future Lady Heversham as far as her birth was concerned, for Colonel Goring had been a gentleman and his wife was a lady, and if they had lived a secluded and unknown existence for many years it was presumably from choice and not from necessity that they had done so. A few elderly soldiers who had been friends of Colonel Goring in old days could remember having heard

some story of a daughter of his by his first wife who had made a bad marriage, but they had forgotten the details of the story as completely as they had forgotten their old brother-officer, until the paragraph announcing Lord Heversham's approaching marriage to his daughter recalled him to their memory. The Gorings did not seem to have any relations, or, if they had, these were not people known to the world of society, so that all that could be gathered about them proceeded from the somewhat hazy recollections of Colonel Goring's old acquaintances. As there was nothing more definite to lay hold of concerning the future Lady Heversham personally than could be learned from Burke's "Landed Gentry" in which the Maitland-Gorings figured, society was intensely curious to see her, and her appearance on the scene was looked forward to as one of the most interesting events of the just commencing season.

When Muriel Heversham did make her *début* in London, society could not conceal its amazement. It had expected to see a shy, dowdy girl, embarrassed at the new position in which she found herself, and

grateful to anyone who would initiate her into the mysteries of her altered surroundings. She was presented by an aunt of her husband's at the last drawing-room in May, some three weeks after her marriage, and by five o'clock that afternoon all London had heard that the most beautiful woman who had been seen in it for several years was the new Lady Heversham. Those who had seen her at Buckingham Palace had immediately realised that here was a woman who, if she could be judged by her appearance and manner, would not be in need of any social godparents. Instead of the provincial girl, uncomfortably conscious of the attention she attracted, a tall, stately woman moved easily and unconcernedly through the rooms, apparently unconscious of, or indifferent to, the interest and ill-concealed excitement which her beauty aroused; an interest which even expressed itself in the presence-room by looks of undisguised surprise and admiration as her name was spoken and she passed before the royalties. Muriel Heversham made a few friends that day, but she also made many enemies. The latter were among the young married women,

who saw with suspicion and alarm the appearance on the scene of an unexpected and formidable rival. The former were among a minority who, looking into her face, said to themselves: "That is a good woman, as well as a beautiful one."

Lord Heversham watched his wife as she approached him on her way from attending the church service which had edified her so little.

She was walking with Mr. Fortescue, a few paces in advance of the remainder of the little party. The fresh green of the young rose-leaves bordering the grey stone balustrade of the terrace, and the ivy-covered archway over the gate of the churchyard behind her, made a pleasing background to her tall and graceful figure as she moved through the warm May sunlight, and Lord Heversham, always appreciative of artistic effects, paused in his walk and looked as a man looks at a picture which takes his fancy.

There was none of that warmth of affection in his gaze which might have been expected from a man who had but recently become the husband of so

beautiful a woman. His look was critical, while at the same time it expressed satisfaction.

"She is a lovely creature," he was thinking to himself; "an ugly woman in an old place like this would be quite a misfortune,—like putting a bad picture into a good frame."

CHAPTER II.

"IT is a mere matter of form,—a duty which I owe to the world. Surely, you must see that for yourself, Marjory?"

Hugh Lester, but a few days become Lord Heversham, was looking anxiously at the woman whose life had been linked with his for the best part of ten years.

Her eyes were turned away from him, and she was gazing out into the little garden of a villa at Highgate, a garden which, small as it was, showed traces of careful tending. Masses of flaming gladioli and groups of many-coloured hollyhocks relieved the sombre smoke-dried leaves of the trees and lilac-bushes, even

though autumn had come and the gardens of the surrounding villas were already dreary and bare.

As he spoke, Mrs. Hungerford turned her face towards him. She was very pale, and there was a curious contracted look in her eyes and on her brow, as though she was trying to solve some intricate problem in her mind. But she was quiet and calm, and her gaze met Hugh Lester's anxious and harassed look tranquilly enough.

"Have I said anything to imply that I do not see it?" she said slowly, in answer to his question. "I think I have seen it for a long time, Hugh," she added —"ever since your brother Edward's death. It is your duty—to the world."

"My duty to you will always remain the same," answered Lord Heversham.

Marjory Hungerford moved a little away from him.

"You have no duty to me—you never had!" she replied. "Ours was a mere temporary partnership, terminable at will, was it not? It happened to suit us both for a good many years, and now—well, now it does not suit us both any longer."

"Marjory, it is not terminable at will!" exclaimed Hugh—"I will never admit that it is. You know how much depends upon this wretched marriage which I am forced to make; but because I am forced to make it is no reason why it should interfere with our lives. You must forget that it exists, or, if you ever remember it, remember it as a necessary evil."

Marjory Hungerford looked at him intently, and did not at once reply.

"You mean that you would marry some girl whom you can present to the world as your wife, and who can bring you children, and yet continue your old relations with me?" she said, presently.

"Yes, that is what I mean," answered Hugh Heversham.

Marjory rose from the chair in which she was sitting and walked to the window. The scent of the musk and the clove carnations came from the flower-borders below, and she wondered vaguely whether she should ever be able to endure their smell again. She even found herself thinking that when Hugh had gone she would have them rooted up, and then a

feeling of surprise floated through her mind that such trifles should be occupying her thoughts. Then she came and stood beside her lover.

"Listen, dear!" she said, and her voice was gentle, but very determined. "I am not a moral woman, but I am not a bad one, and I will not do this thing that you ask me. Women like myself are supposed to be wholly bad, because we are what the world calls immoral. I do not want you to think me a bad woman, Hugh."

He looked at her but half understanding her meaning.

"Are you prepared to play the part of the accommodating husband?"

Marjory put her question with a simple directness, but there was a touch of irony in her accents.

"No, my dear Hugh," she continued, as he hesitated to reply to her, "it won't do; and I am not going to spoil your life. Another woman might not look at the matter in the same light, perhaps. No doubt if I had lived with you for the sake of what I could get out of you I should look at it in another light

also. I have not lived with you for that object, and that makes all the difference. You have changed your name—you must change your life with it. I have lived with Hugh Lester," she added, with a little sudden smile which the tears rising in her eyes as suddenly quenched, "but Lord Heversham must live with his wife."

Hugh took her in his arms and covered her face with kisses. For a few moments he forgot his promise to his dead brother and his resolution to act according to it. He remembered only the ties of many years which bound him to the woman who lay in his embrace, the perfect sympathy which had existed between them, the harmony and contentment which she had brought into his life.

"Marjory," he exclaimed passionately, "you are a noble woman! There is not another woman in England who would do as you are doing; but I will not accept your sacrifice. Live with me as my wife, if you will not live with me in any other way. Heversham and everything belonging to it can go to the devil, and we will live for each other. I have never asked

you before to marry me, Marjory. I wish to God I had done so years ago—but I ask you now!"

For the space of a few seconds Marjory Hungerford lay quiet and unresisting in his arms. The sound of children's laughter came from the public roadway beyond the little garden and fell upon her ears with a cruel irony.

If she had had children, she thought bitterly, perhaps Hugh would have married her long ago. There was a time when he would have done so, had she so chosen, before his second brother, Edward, had died, and when he had no prospects of succeeding to Heversham.

A terrible temptation assailed her to take her lover at his word. She knew that he was genuinely fond of her and that he meant what he said; but she knew, too, that her love was the greater. She was not blind to the weaknesses of Hugh's character, and, womanlike, loved him the more on account of them. To be in love with imaginary perfection is seldom a perfect love, and the angels do not rejoice over those who have never fallen. It hurt her a little that she could

not make him understand why she was averse from consenting to the course which he had wished her to pursue. His proposal to throw everything to the winds and marry her was one which an instant's reflection taught her proceeded from two sources,—the spontaneous generosity of the moment, and the struggle against the surrender of a mode of life which had responded to all the requirements of her lover's sensuous nature.

Marjory Hungerford was not an ordinary woman, and her life before she knew Hugh Lester had not been an ordinary life. The report that Lord Heversham, Hugh's brother, had heard that she was a lady by birth and education was a true one, but she had never mentioned her father's name. Hugh had once questioned her on this point. It was shortly after their intimacy had begun, and as from the first day that he was in her company it had become obvious to him that she was not only a lady but an unusually well-educated one, he had not unnaturally felt considerable curiosity as to the facts in her past life which had led her astray from the paths of respectability.

"I will tell you all my story from the time I left my father's home," she had said to him in reply to his question, "but of my life before that I will tell you nothing. It is dead and buried. My father was dead to me for many years before he really died,—it was his wish to be so, and I respected it. My mother died when I was a child, and my father married again and took his second wife's name, for she had money. Do not ask me his name, for since I left my husband I have never mentioned it. He was the last of his family, and I had no brothers, so, when he took my stepmother's name, his own was extinguished for ever."

Hugh promised that he would never again allude to the subject, and Mrs. Hungerford told him unreservedly the history of her life, commencing from the time of her marriage.

It was a common story enough. That of a girl ill-treated and deceived by her husband and driven to the act of folly which wrecked her life by her faith in another man, who traded upon her misery and then abandoned her to her fate.

She had been married at nineteen to an officer in a cavalry regiment, and had accompanied him to India, only to discover after little more than a year had passed that she had married a man who was not only unfaithful to her but who drank and ill-treated her.

Her marriage had not been one of affection, for she had married as a means of escape from a home which had become unbearable to her since her father had taken a second wife who was not many years older than herself, and who was unreasonably jealous of her.

Neglected wives have no lack of opportunity to console themselves in India, and the inevitable consoler was not long in making his appearance. An insidious sympathy with her troubles soon caused her to entertain a warm friendship for her sympathiser, which as quickly ripened into love on her part and passion on his. She believed in his protestations of devotion, and allowed herself to be persuaded that the only means of freeing herself from her husband was to yield herself to the man who swore to her

that he would take the latter's place and marry her so soon as a divorce should have been obtained. She did not know that her husband's notorious infidelities to her, coupled with cruelty which she would have had no difficulty in proving, would have given her her freedom from him had she claimed it, and she yielded to the passion which she believed to be a chivalrous love.

Her fall gave her the desired liberty, for her husband was about to obtain a divorce from her; but the man to whose honour she had trusted left India while the suit was still pending, and she never saw him or heard from him again. The divorce was on the point of being pronounced when her husband fell ill with fever, to which, owing to his intemperate habits, he speedily succumbed. Her father, on hearing of the scandal, wrote her a brief letter in which he told her that he would never see her again, and that he looked upon her as one dead. His wife, delighted at the unexpected chance which had occurred of ridding herself for ever of a stepdaughter whom she detested, had done her best to influence his anger

against her, threatening to leave his roof if he ever received his disgraced and dishonoured daughter under it. Nobody pitied her; no one stretched out a helping hand to her. The women, many of whom were doing in secret and without her excuses what she had done openly, ignored her, and the men insulted her by their free and easy patronage of her when their womenkind were safely out of the way.

So far her story, pitiable as it was, was ordinary enough. She left India and returned to Europe, friendless and alone. Luckily she had a small income of her own, which had come to her from her mother, and this sufficed to make her independent. She had, moreover, something which was of equal use to her, and this was a talent for writing. When she left India, she determined that she would settle herself down in some Italian town and there devote herself to exercise this gift. Nobody would know her, and to conceal her identity as completely as possible she assumed the name of Hungerford. It was as good a name as any other, she thought, and nobody would be likely to connect a stray Mrs. Hungerford

with the ruined woman who had disappeared almost unnoticed from India. The capital whence her little income was derived was entirely at her own disposal, and the last communication she had with her father's lawyer was to authorise him to realise and pay it over to her, after which she had reinvested it under her new name.

She wrote under the *nom de plume* of Cecil White, a name which might cover either a masculine or a feminine identity, and it amused her when her reviewers could not make up their minds as to her sex. Her publishers were equally in the dark as to the identity of the author who from time to time forwarded to them works which showed an ever-increasing literary skill and fertility of thought and imagination. Whatever may have been their private impressions as to her sex, they invariably addressed her as "Dear Sir" in their correspondence with her.

For two years after landing from India, Marjory Hungerford had settled herself down in a small apartment at Venice, and had fought against her sorrows and her loneliness with the powerful weapons which

study and hard work afforded her. She had a real love of writing, and as she felt her power increase, and her grasp over thought and language become stronger, her interest in her pursuit became greater and more absorbing. Undeterred by first failures, she had worked steadily on, conscious of a power within herself which would not be denied expression. She had no fear of being molested at Venice,—so few of those who knew her in England were likely to come there, and indeed her acquaintances had been limited to the small circle of neighbours who lived near her father's house in the country. She knew the days when the P. & O. steamers would land or embark their passengers to and from India, and on these days she would avoid the Piazza San Marco and the parts of the city where she would be likely to run against Indian military and civil officials or their belongings, who might recognise her.

The tranquil beauty of Venice had a healing effect upon her mind and nerves after the strain which they had undergone. Marjory Hungerford had all the artist's love for, and consolation in, the beautiful,

and the silent city of the sea had a peculiar fascination for her. Sometimes she would go and sit amidst the mellow glories of San Marco, or bid her gondolier take her out into the wide expanse of the Laguna Viva, whence she could feast her eyes upon the changing lights falling upon the distant palaces and *campanili;* but most of all she felt the subtle beauty of Venice when she was energetic enough to rise with the dawn of a summer morning and go out upon the waters. Then the city seemed to have sprung from the deep like some fairy Atlantis, and rosy tints would rest upon the *cupole* of the churches and the slender belfries, creeping stealthily downwards as the sun rose out of the Adriatic, and the buildings would gradually stand out in ever bolder relief until the broad glittering track of the risen sun swept over the lagoon and engirdled them in a flood of golden light.

It was hours like these which saved Marjory Hungerford from listening to the voices which bade her despair. Most women in her condition would have taken refuge in religion, and found relief, and perhaps moral safety, in upbraiding themselves as

miserable sinners, but the consolations of religion did not appeal to her. She wanted something she could lay tangible hold of,—something which she could place between herself and the future. Notwithstanding all that had happened to her, she felt a certain amount of confidence in herself, and she felt, moreover, that to throw her responsibilities and difficulties upon religion was a weak way of getting rid of them, and one which was not likely to answer. There are many in this world, both men, and women, who are irreligious from the point of view of the churches, but who yet believe and trust in God.

Rightly or wrongly, Marjory Hungerford preferred to trust to her pen rather than to her prayer-book. Work, she thought, would take her out of herself, whereas religion would have the opposite effect, and she thanked God that a facility to write had been granted to her, and that she was able to take pleasure in the beautiful things of the world around her. Nature was to her a perpetual delight. She loved it, and it gave her in return some of her best thoughts and inspirations, besides filling her life with interests

and pleasures which enabled her, sometimes, almost to forget her loneliness and the fact that she was an outcast from society. Perhaps this love of nature and eagerness to develop the talent which she felt was in her was not such a poor substitute for religious feeling as those possessing the latter would assert. She often thought, when wondering to herself why she could not believe and find help and consolation in the forms of Christianity which appealed so deeply to others, that God perhaps had other ways of raising his fallen creatures than through the narrow dogmas of the churches. Had not Christ spoken of other sheep and other folds as being under his care? She thought that perhaps she belonged to one of these; for the folds alike of Catholicism and Protestantism seemed strange to her, possibly because she felt unable to believe what she had heard from the shepherds.

At Venice she tried to force her mind to open itself to Catholicism,—if not to believe in it, at least to be able to understand its power. The ritual of the Church appealed to her sense of the picturesque, but its perpetual symbolism wearied her, and, more-

over, she could not believe in that ever-recurring miracle which is the very centre and pivot of Catholic belief. The idea of the Supreme Spirit who controlled the sources of life, the Creator of worlds innumerable, that all-pervading God whom she recognised in the Nature around her, entering at the summons of a priest into a piece of bread, was revolting to her conception of the Deity, and she shrank from dwelling upon a dogma which must be the expression either of an unfathomable truth or of an unparalleled falsehood.

So Marjory Hungerford had turned away from dogmatic religion, not with any feeling of scorn or bitterness, but rather with a sense of her own defects and a reverent regret that what others believed in or accepted unquestioningly left her incredulous and indifferent.

She threw herself heart and soul into her literary work, and for a year did not move from Venice except for a few weeks in August and September, when the scirocco and the mosquitos make life on the Venetian lagoons unbearable. During those months

she went to a quiet little spot in the Austrian Tyrol, where, amongst the pine-forests and the mountains, she finished a novel upon which she had been working all the summer. The book had an immediate and very marked success, and requests for contributions from her pen soon began to flow in to her, while her publishers were anxious to secure a second novel by Cecil White, which they could bring out before Christmas. From that time her success as an author had been assured. The public was always ready to buy a new book by Cecil White. It found her characters human, and that her pages treated almost invariably of the bright and happy side of life, and with its joys rather than with its physical and moral miseries.

Such had been Marjory Hungerford's history up to the time when she first met Hugh Lester. Her literary work had absorbed her life. She often wondered what would have been her fate had she not thrown herself into it. From her father she never heard again, but learned indirectly that he had become a great invalid since the death of an only son

whom he had had by his second wife, and that he and her stepmother spent much of their time on the Riviera, where the latter owned a villa. Mrs. Hungerford's writings brought her in a considerable addition to her yearly income after the publication of her first two books, but she made very little difference in her manner of living. She kept her apartment at Venice, where she continued to pass many months of the year, and whence she sent some of her best work to her publishers in London. The remainder of her time she devoted to travelling, very often in remote and little known places, studying the characteristics of the different countries and people, and ever laying in a stock of fresh material for future books.

In many of these places she made passing acquaintances, but very few friends. The friends whom she did make had no idea that the pleasant, quiet young widow they knew as Mrs. Hungerford was the famous writer Cecil White. They thought her a singularly well-informed and agreeable person, and wondered why anyone with so much charm of face and manner should be wandering about the world

alone, but concluded that she had been deeply attached to her dead husband and had not recovered his loss.

An accident which occurred to Marjory Hungerford while spending the month of August at a little village above the Lake of Como was the cause of her first acquaintance with Hugh Lester.

There was absolutely nothing romantic about the incident, such as a boat capsizing on the lake and her being rescued from a watery grave by Hugh at the peril of his life. A slip on one of the steep mountain paths, which in that district are paved with cobble-stones worn smooth by the rain and by the friction caused by the faggots of brushwood which the peasants drag down from the heights above, resulted in a fall and a sprained ankle. In descending one of these lanes Marjory had trodden upon the skin of a ripe fig, and, before she had realised what had happened, she was lying on her back with a sharp pain in her foot and a dull one at the back of her head, which had hit the stones in her fall. She had noticed just before falling a tall figure in a light

grey suit a little way ahead of her, which—from the grey suit—she had judged to be that of some visitor to Bellagio or Cadenabbia taking a walk among the mountains.

The blow on her head had partially stunned her for a few moments, and when she recovered herself the stranger was standing by her side. Her exclamation and the sound of her fall had caused him to turn round, and, seeing what had happened, he had hurried back to offer his assistance.

Declaring that it was nothing of any consequence, Marjory had risen to her feet and attempted to walk, but after limping for a few yards she was obliged to take her companion's arm in order to save herself from falling a second time. A further attempt to use her foot caused her such severe pain that she was compelled to sit down, and then an examination of the foot revealed the fact that the ankle was already beginning to swell, and that it was a clear case of a bad sprain, if not of dislocation.

"You must let me take off the shoe," Hugh had said to her, "and bind your ankle up, *alla meglio,* as

they say here, until a doctor can look at it," and then he had asked her where she was staying, for he saw that it was impossible that she should be able to walk the two miles or so which still separated them from the lake shore, where a carriage or a boat could be procured to take her home.

Marjory told him that she was living at Varenna. She had, as a matter of fact, rented a little villa there for three months, and had brought her Venetian household with her.

By good luck a man came down the path towards them, one of the stalwart, handsome young *contadini* of the country. As soon as he had heard what had happened he readily volunteered his services, and between them they carried Marjory down by easy stages until they reached the highroad from Lecco to Chiavenna which runs parallel with the lake.

From here the lad went away with his long swinging strides into the little town of Varenna, whence he soon returned with a carriage, into which they placed Marjory.

Hugh Lester was already fumbling in his pockets

for some francs to give the boy when Marjory said to him hurriedly in English: "Please, do not offer him anything! I know these people—you will offend him very much." She held out her hand to the boy and thanked him for his help with a kindly smile. "You must come and see me," she said to him, as he stood with his hat off and her hand in his. "I shall be very glad to see you, and you must ask for the Villa Teresa—it is on the road beyond the *paese*. You will come some day when you are in Varenna, will you not?"

The boy thanked her and shook hands with her with the graceful manners of his kind in Italy, and Hugh Lester felt angry with himself for having made a mistake.

Perhaps Marjory Hungerford noticed his momentary embarrassment, for she smiled and said to him: "There is an idea that all Italians think of nothing but money, and of what they can get out of strangers. It is a great mistake. The true gentlemen in Italy are usually to be found in the so-called lower classes, which is a confusing state of things until one knows the people."

Hugh Lester was considerably interested in his new acquaintance, and wondered to himself whether she were married or single and what her name might be. Varenna was not a place where English people as a rule took villas,—indeed there were only two or three villas to take, and a small hotel with a lovely view up the Lago di Lecco, whither visitors from Bellagio and Cadenabbia would row across and have tea. As the carriage was about to drive away to the Villa Teresa, and Marjory thanked him for his kindness and timely aid, he hazarded a hope that he might be allowed to call and inquire how she was and what the doctor's report on the extent of the damage done to her ankle had been. Marjory felt that she could hardly, without appearing to be discourteous, refuse his request, more especially as she had just invited the young *contadino* to come and pay her a visit, and she therefore said that she should be very pleased to see him if he cared to come and have a cup of tea in her garden some afternoon.

"But you forget that I have not the honour of

knowing whom I am to ask for!" he said to her, laughing. Marjory laughed also. "True," she replied, "I had forgotten that we had not been formally introduced to each other. My name is Mrs. Hungerford; for the matter of that, if you asked for the Signora Inglese it would do as well, if not better!"

"And mine," he answered, "is Lester, Hugh Lester."

She bowed, and thanking him once again told the coachman to drive on. The pain in her foot was growing intolerable, for, notwithstanding all the care that her bearers had taken not to shake her more than was inevitable, the long descent of the steep path, much of which was down uneven steps, had been far from pleasant.

When the doctor examined Marjory Hungerford's foot he found that the sprain was a severe one, and that it must be some days before she could put it to the ground. His verdict did not greatly concern her, for she could both read and write in comfort when she was lifted onto a sofa which was wheeled

into the shade of some large magnolias in the garden, whence she could look out over the lake.

A couple of days had passed since her accident, and Marjory began to think that, after all, the request for permission to come and ask after her had been made merely for the sake of politeness, and that Mr. Lester had had no real intention of troubling himself to come over to Varenna to call. Her other rescuer had been more assiduous in his inquiries, for, on the morning following her fall, and long before she had left her room, a basket of fresh ripe figs and some bunches of glossy purple grapes, with the dewdrops still upon them, had been left at the villa by the lad who had helped to carry her, and her servants told her that the bearer of it had asked minutely how she was, and had seemed delighted at the assurance that there was "nulla di grave" in her accident.

She was lying on her sofa in the garden, with her writing materials and some books on a little table beside her, when her gondolier, whom she had brought from Venice to act as her manservant, came to her with Hugh Lester's card and an inquiry whether she

would receive him, and she told the man to bring him to her.

Their conversation had started, after the necessary questions on his part and answers on hers about her sprained ankle, with the discussion of the most ordinary topics,—the beauty of the view from the garden, and the different excursions of interest to be made on the lake. Hugh told her that he was staying at the Hotel Bellevue at Cadenabbia, and was on his way, via Verona and the Brenner, to visit some friends in Austria. Though he was full of curiosity as to why this handsome countrywoman of his should be alone in a villa in an out of the way little place like Varenna, he was much too well-bred to display it by asking any questions.

He had looked in vain for any visible signs of Mr. Hungerford—such as hats, sticks, or other masculine appendages—as he passed through the house into the garden, but had seen nothing to indicate the presence of a man on the premises except, indeed, a pair of white duck trousers hanging up outside a window at the back of the villa, which inference sug-

gested as being the property of the gondolier who, picturesquely clad in white with a red sash wound round his waist, was conducting him to Mrs. Hungerford. It was not until his glance had fallen upon the little table by the side of his hostess that the conversation began to touch upon less commonplace subjects than the scenery and the weather. Hugh Lester's quick eyes noticed some sheets of closely written manuscript lying upon it.

"Evidently you are not idle during your temporary imprisonment, Mrs. Hungerford," he said, smiling.

"I am very fond of reading," Marjory replied, ignoring the presence of the pages of manuscript and her visitor's questioning look at them. Their talk had then fallen upon books and authors, and she was astonished at the evidences of wide reading and good taste which her new acquaintance exhibited, while he on his side was equally surprised and delighted at finding that she knew all his favourite authors. Amongst others the latest book by Cecil White was mentioned, and Hugh Lester asked her if she liked it.

Marjory Hungerford was too well accustomed to being asked by casual acquaintances her opinion of her own work to display any embarrassment in her reply.

"I know all his books," she said with a smile, stooping to a prevarication in possessive pronouns. "Are you an admirer of his writings, Mr. Lester?"

"I admire him immensely, if it is a him," Hugh replied, with much enthusiasm and little grammar. "*There* is an author who feels what he writes," he continued, "and he does not poke about in the mud for his effects. I have always thought that I should like to know Cecil White. He has a way of looking at the pleasing side of life which is very refreshing in these days; a little too optimistic in his views, perhaps, but that is better than the weak pessimism of the majority of our modern writers of all nationalities. It is so easy to be an extremist; and to describe people and things as wholly good or wholly bad seems to me to be the result of a superficial knowledge of life."

"And therefore no true art," concluded his hostess.

He looked at her quickly and with some curiosity.

"And no true art," he said, repeating her words. "No, Mrs. Hungerford, I think that you are quite right there. I am not fond of the Berninis of literature. That is why I admire Cecil White,—if he errs, it is on the side of beauty and not of ugliness, of delicacy and not of coarseness. As I say, I should like to meet him in the flesh."

Marjory Hungerford rang a little silver bell which stood on the table beside her.

"I daresay that you would be horribly disappointed," she said with a slight laugh, which Hugh thought a very musical one. "I believe that authors and artists are almost invariably quite the reverse of what one has imagined them to be. A famous poet was once pointed out to me. He was a fat little man with a red nose, and I heard afterwards that he composed his best poems when drunk."

At this moment the servant answered her summons, and Mrs. Hungerford told him to bring the tea.

When her visitor had taken his leave she felt quite surprised to think how much she had enjoyed

her conversation with him, and when he asked if he might come to see her again before he left the lake she had assented cordially enough.

It was a long time since she had had anyone with whom she could discuss books and the merits of different authors, and, indeed, she did not remember ever having done so in as satisfactory a manner. During her life in India she had not met people whose literary tastes and ideas were of any very high standard, and since that time books and her own thoughts had been her almost exclusive companions. The interchange of ideas seemed quite a strange and unaccustomed luxury. For the first time, perhaps, she had realised the loneliness of her life, and remembered that she was young.

The first visit of Hugh Lester's to the Villa Teresa was, naturally, by no means the last, and he had always some excellent excuse ready for postponing his departure from Cadenabbia. At last Marjory Hungerford would lie and watch for the little boat which would come across the lake from the opposite shore at about four o'clock with amazing regularity, and

Giuseppe the gondolier would place two cups on the tea-table as a matter of course. He, indeed, highly approved of the fact that at last his *padrona* had a male visitor, for he had always considered it to be a ridiculous thing that she should shut herself up with books and an ink-pot when there were so many much more amusing things to be done in life. To be sure she was English, and the English were not like other people; but here at last was an Englishman who seemed to have some sense in his head!

When Marjory was able to leave her sofa Hugh would take her out in his boat on the lake, for it was some time before she was able to walk any distance after her accident.

So the days had passed, and mutual tastes and kindred ideas caused their acquaintanceship to ripen into friendship, and from friendship they drifted almost insensibly into love. When they discovered the real state of their feelings towards each other Marjory Hungerford related the history of her past life. Hugh had already told her all that there was to tell about himself, and from him she had concealed nothing,

save her real name, and the fact that she was that Cecil White whom he had wished to know.

Hugh Lester was not at all the sort of man who always thinks that women are in love with him, and it was only after he could not fail to see that Mrs. Hungerford had begun to care for him that he looked at the situation seriously. He had not the slightest intention of marrying anybody, and he felt that he could not allow this girl, who was a widow and therefore free, to entertain any false hopes and ideas on the subject. During the whole of the time he had known her it had never once entered his head that she was a woman who could be approached in any other way save by that of the Church, or, possibly, if he were to judge from her evident disbelief in the claims of the various churches, that of the Registry office. She had never by word or look given him the slightest right to suspect anything to the contrary, and he had come to the conclusion that either waste of time or unpleasant complications must be the inevitable results of his frequent visits to the Villa Teresa, now that he saw unmistakable symptoms of

a more than merely friendly regard for him on Marjory Hungerford's part and felt that he also was falling under the spell of a powerful fascination.

To do Hugh justice, he had no wish or intention to compromise his newly made friend, but neither had he any intention of compromising himself.

Marjory, on her side, felt very bitterly that she was sailing under false colours, and the feeling became intolerable to her when once she realised that she had allowed herself to fall in love. Had Hugh ever presumed upon his friendship with her her scruples would probably have been less clamorous, but he had always treated her with the utmost respect and delicacy. She knew quite well who he was, for he had often talked to her about his life in England, and she knew, too, that he was unmarried and independent. She considered that she was deceiving him in not telling him that she was a divorced woman, whose family had disowned her and whose lover had ruined and forsaken her. She would not, she felt, sink to the level of an adventuress. For all she knew, this man who came daily to see her, and

who made no secret of the delight it was to him to be in her company, might think that she was a woman whom he could marry without detriment to himself. She was very well aware that no man could marry her without that, and she was not even sure that she felt at all inclined to risk matrimony a second time. Her first experiences of that sacrament had not been pleasant, and if there were loneliness in her present life there was also a delightful sense of moral and physical freedom.

Her utterly friendless condition had caused Marjory Hungerford to take an exaggerated view of the hopelessness of her position in the world. She thought that the finger of scorn must perforce be for ever pointed at the woman who had left her husband at the bidding of a lover who had deserted her when he had obtained all he wanted. No subsequent marriage, she thought, would ever reinstate her in the eyes of Society, or give her back her lost character. There was nobody to tell her that she had in reality been more sinned against than sinning, and that, her husband having died before the divorce was pro-

nounced, not even the immoral and unreasonable priestly anathema against the marriage of divorced persons in each other's respective lifetime could have any existence in her case.

Had she been a Catholic, any priest to whom she had told her story in the confessional would have exhorted her to marry if she had an opportunity of doing so, lest worse should befall her than that which had already befallen. But she was neither Catholic nor Protestant, and the thought of marriage was as distasteful to her as it was to Hugh. The ideal of domestic happiness, according to each of them, would be a life in which the higher senses should be developed and the desires of nature satisfied, without proprietary clauses, legal and religious, being introduced as a bond between the contracting parties.

Fate, in the shape of a fig thrown down in a Lombardy lane, had brought these two erratic mortals together, and the pity of it was that, ten years afterwards, Fate should have chosen to interfere in an arrangement which answered very well by causing Hugh Lester to become Earl of Heversham.

If anything had been wanting to strengthen her faith in the belief that Hugh was a man with whom she could be happy, and that he was a gentleman in mind as well as in name, it would have been supplied by the latter's conduct to her after the revelation which she had thought it her duty to make to him.

So far from exhibiting any change of manner towards her, or taking advantage of what he had heard to treat her as a woman whose favours might be lightly won, he had been, if possible, more respectful in his attitude towards her than before.

The story he had heard from her lips had touched him, and that she should have told it to him was a proof at once of its truth and of her disinterestedness and regard for himself.

At the same time he could not but feel that it simplified their future relations to each other very considerably. He felt intuitively that she did not expect him to marry her, for in telling her story she had succeeded in conveying to him that impression.

If Marjory Hungerford had had any vague idea that the revealing of her past would raise a sort of

barrier between them she did not exhibit on that occasion the insight into human nature which was to be expected of an authoress. Both of them had felt, on the contrary, that a barrier which had existed between them had been suddenly swept away, and that they were free to love one another if they so chose, and the circumstances of their surroundings contributed to lead their love to its consummation.

The languorous autumn days of Italy and the soft fragrant nights had seemed made for love. The walks through the vineyards among vines laden and bending beneath the wealth of purple grapes, the lovely views over water and wood, valley and mountain, the perfect solitude, all these were as very food and drink to nourish love by day. And when the sun set and the stars glittered on the still black surface of the lake, or the moon rose over the mountain-tops and changed the blackness into ripples of silvery light, the air itself breathed love, and after dinner the two would let their little boat drift out onto the waters where the tinkling of the little bells fixed to the fishing-nets and the striking of the church clocks along the shore

were the only sounds, save the murmur of their own voices, which broke the stillness around them.

Hugh Lester never went to Austria that autumn. They lingered on the lake of Como until the grapes were gathered and the chestnut-woods showed russet and gold on the mountain-sides, and then they went to Venice, and from there southward to Sicily.

After Christmas her lover had persuaded Marjory to go to England. The apartment at Venice was given up and she installed herself in the little villa at Highgate, in the drawing-room of which she and Hugh, now Lord Heversham, were sitting on this September afternoon when, after nearly ten years of perfect happiness, she saw that the hour for them to part had come.

She had never allowed her lover to pay a penny for her house and establishment. Her own income, coupled with the money she earned by her writing, was more than sufficient to meet all her wants, and Hugh had understood her feeling on the subject. She had chosen to give him her love, but she would not live upon his money. It was with difficulty that he

could persuade her to take the presents which he wished to give her.

Those had been happy years, untroubled by the worries of married life and the responsibilities of children; years which had passed with both of them in the happy consciousness that they mutually gave to each other what they wanted out of existence. The sense of mutual passion was the lowest of the senses which formed a link between them, but in Marjory it was, perhaps, stronger than in Hugh Lester. His sense of the æsthetic caused him to look upon the woman who had become his mistress as much from that point of view as from that of the lover, and perhaps more so. She satisfied, in short, his fastidiousness at every point and in every detail. There were no jarring notes, none of those little pin-pricks so often produced by the loved one failing to come up to the expectations of the lover in the countless trifles of life,—those little seeds of disappointment and disillusion which are so insignificant in themselves but which are apt to contain the germs of future discord and the death of love.

Marjory Hungerford's nature was a far warmer one than that of her lover, and, if less artistic, it was more intellectual.

Æstheticism not being the leading motive of her character, she was without the unconscious selfishness by which it is always accompanied; for not even its highest form is free from a most unattractive egoism.

Even the religious æsthete, whose sense of the beautiful centres itself in the pursuit of what he believes to be pleasing to his God (and therefore advantageous to himself), in the course of that pursuit is apt to mortify with supreme indifference the flesh of other people. But of all forms of æstheticism, the religious has always been the most selfish. It invented Hell in order to enhance the æsthetic beauties of Heaven.

The first premonitory sign which Marjory had had that the break-up of a purely voluntary union unprotected by legal obligations might be brought about by circumstances quite independent of a change in personal feelings was when Hugh had told her of his brother Edward's death, and had explained to her

that he was now the heir to his eldest brother's title and estates.

She had instantly realised all that this implied, and it was her genuine love for him which had caused her at once to see that the time was not far distant when their present life together could not continue without detriment to him, for which she was determined that she would not be responsible.

During the five years or so which had elapsed between the time when Hugh became his brother's heir and that of his actual succession to the title, Marjory Hungerford had striven to accustom her mind to the idea that their roads in life must part. She was quite determined that she would not spoil his future by allowing him to marry her, even if he offered to do so, but she was determined also that, if he married another woman, their present relations to one another must cease.

She was not a moral woman, as she had just told him when the blow had fallen and he had proposed a compromise, but neither was she a bad one, and there was something in her which revolted at the

thought of being the cause of possible suffering and unhappiness to that other woman whom her lover would have to make his wife. What she had given to that lover had been given spontaneously, of her own free will and pleasure. There had been no buying and selling of love between them in the past, and there should be no illicit sharing of it in the future. So much she owed to her own standard of what was right and what was wrong, and if her standard was a low one as compared with that of more virtuous women she felt that it was high enough for her.

And thus when Hugh had suggested that his marriage need not necessarily put an end to their relations with each other, she had firmly and decidedly refused to listen to his offer, knowing that the latter was made in a moment of rebellion against the changes that fate had sent into his life.

It was in vain that her lover argued with her. She was not to be moved from her determination. At last Hugh became impatient, and upbraided her for loving him so little that she was ready to sacrifice him to a wholly unnecessary scruple.

"It is because I love you that I want you to do this thing that is so disagreeable to you," she said to him gently. "Some day you will understand that I only want your happiness."

They sat and talked until the short September evening began to close in. Marjory Hungerford succeeded in persuading him that it would be an act of folly on their parts to marry each other. She pointed out to him that he would be hampered with a childless wife whom society would not receive. The world knew little or nothing about her now as Mrs. Hungerford. It would be very different if she were Lady Heversham, for then there would be plenty of people eager to trace her antecedents. He would be spoiling his own career and bringing scandal upon her if he married her.

Hugh could not but see that she was right. A woman in another class of life, would, in nine cases out of ten, have had no scruples in accepting him and becoming Countess of Heversham even if other countesses did turn their backs upon her; but Lord Heversham felt that he was in the hands of a woman

of his own class, and he considered that he was bound to accept her refusal of him.

It had not been so easy to persuade him that if there could be no marriage between them neither could there be a continuation of their present relations towards each other when he had a wife. He could not look upon the matter in the same light as did Marjory, being so sure that the woman who married him would do so for his title and money and not for himself. He regarded his marriage as he asked her to regard it,—as a necessary evil, a thing which fate had forced upon him, and which ought not to be allowed to interfere with the happiness of their mutual lives.

He could not understand Marjory's scruples about wronging the woman he should marry. She was pained, and also surprised, that he did not see the matter in her light. She thought that he would have realised at once the meanness of deceiving the girl who married him,—the sordidness of it if the girl was not deceived and knew that her husband had a mistress and that she herself had only been married

to bring him children, and had only married him because he was a great match.

She believed that Hugh, with his refined instincts and quick perceptions, and distaste for anything which offended them, would have been the first to realise the unpleasing side of such a situation. For a moment, too, she wondered that he did not understand that her own self-respect would be wounded, and that she must lose caste in his eyes also should she consent to such a compromise.

Perhaps, had she been of a more æsthetic disposition herself she would only have regarded her lover's inability to follow her reasoning as natural. It was, after all, only the egoism of the æsthetic principle asserting itself.

At last Marjory Hungerford had implored him to leave her. She was wearied and worn out mentally and physically by the strain which she had undergone, which had increased in tension ever since the news had come of the late Lord Heversham's illness and death.

Hugh told her that he was obliged to go down

to Heversham for a few days on business concerning his brother's affairs, and that he feared it would be some days, perhaps a week, before he could see her again.

"Think well of what I have asked you," he said to her as he took her in his arms and kissed her again and again; "do not send me away from you unnecessarily."

Marjory Hungerford released herself from his embrace with a little shiver.

"No," she answered slowly, and very softly, "I will not send you away from me unnecessarily;" and she took his head between her hands, and drawing it gently down towards her, kissed his forehead. "You shall have my final answer when you come back from Heversham," she said; "until then please do not write to me. I want to be alone, and to think. I do not want letters. Good-bye, Hugh; God bless you always, dear."

And so, looking into his eyes with a brave, sad smile, she signed to him to leave her, and then she stood still, listening to the sound of his footsteps as

they crossed the little hall and passed along the gravel walk to the gate of the garden. Then she heard a cab stop and his voice give the directions to the driver, and, as the sound of the horses' hoofs died away, Marjory Hungerford fell face forwards on the sofa where he had been sitting, silent and motionless, —for there is a grief which is beyond tears.

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Just a week afterwards a cab drove up to the Villa at Highgate, and as Lord Heversham sprang out of it his eyes fell upon a notice board fixed to the wall of the garden with the words "to be let or sold" painted upon it, followed by the agent's name and address. The windows were closed and shuttered, and with a deadly chill at his heart,—hardly daring to think of what he feared, he pealed the bell of the house. Instead of the manservant who knew him well, a caretaker came to the door.

"Mrs. Hungerford?" Lord Heversham gasped out rather than spoke—"is she—"

"The lady left three days ago, sir, for foreign parts. Was you a-wanting to take the villa? or, stay

—perhaps you are the Mr. Lester for whom she left a letter, to be given to you when you called. Is it Mr. Lester?"

Lord Heversham groaned. He understood now what it meant. Marjory had left him.

"I am Mr. Lester," he said hurriedly to the old woman, who looked at him suspiciously; "give me the letter."

It was lying sealed and addressed to him on the table in the little hall, and Lord Heversham seized it and tore it open.

There were only a few lines, in Marjory Hungerford's well-known handwriting.

"I love you too well to do what you ask me, and therefore, as we had better not see each other again, I am going abroad to-night. I trust to you not to attempt to follow me, and moreover it would be useless for you to do so, as I shall have left Europe by the time you receive this. All I ask of you for the sake of the past is to marry as you ought, and to do your duty to your wife as I am doing what I know to be my duty by you. Some day, perhaps, we can meet again as old and dear friends. MARJORY."

Heedless of the caretaker's gaze Lord Heversham stood twisting the little note round and round be-

tween his fingers. His face was very white, and the woman had asked him twice whether he had come to take the house, and whether she should open the windows for him to see the rooms, before he had heard her.

"I am going to take the house, yes," he answered at last, as he gathered the drift of her question. "Never mind about the rooms, I know them very well. I will see the agents about it,"—and holding Marjory's letter in his hand he went out into the little garden in which they had so often sat together on summer nights.

A visit to the local house-agent resulted in the information that Mrs. Hungerford had placed the villa in his hands with instructions to let it unfurnished, or sell the remainder of her lease, which was a long one. The furniture was to be warehoused in her name, and most of it had been already removed to the depository. Mrs. Hungerford had gone abroad, the agent understood, but he was empowered to conclude the rental or sale of the villa on her behalf.

"I will buy the remainder of Mrs. Hungerford's

lease," said Hugh, "if you will be so kind as to draw up the necessary documents as soon as possible, and send them to my lawyers." He gave the house-agent his card, and the address of his London solicitors.

It was a sort of satisfaction to think that he should own the house in which they had been so happy together. He would never allow it to be lived in, he thought, until she would come back to it.

CHAPTER III.

For such of their guests as preferred to adhere to the uncomfortable British custom of turning breakfast into a formal meal, to be taken seated round a long table and served by domestics who had barely time to clear it away before having to relay the table for luncheon, the Hevershams took care that, at any hour between half-past nine and half-past eleven, an ample repast with a constant succession of hot dishes should always be ready. They themselves, however, never appeared at it, and those who, for one reason

or another, preferred the privacy of their own rooms at such hours of the morning, had only to give their orders accordingly. Lord Heversham was of the opinion that, unless the day was going to be devoted to some kind of sport, in which case it was, of course, more convenient for those about to indulge in it to breakfast together, the national habit of breaking one's fast in the morning in company with one's fellow-creatures was a relic of barbarous times, and his wife shared his views on the subject.

It happened, therefore, that, the party which they had invited to spend Whitsuntide at Heversham being a small one, only some five or six people were sitting at a round table, bright with flowers and old Crown Derby china, in a sunny apartment which was used as a breakfast-room when there were but few people staying in the house.

As it was Whit-Monday and, therefore, a Bank holiday, the letters had not arrived. Heversham was some distance from a post-office, and the postman, who served the district on a tricycle, which occasionally ran away with him down the steep hills and

deposited him and the local correspondence in a ditch, was enjoying a well-earned repose.

A person must be an exceptionally brilliant conversationalist who can talk at breakfast without the remainder of the company wishing that he would hold his tongue and eat his food, and the morning's letters form an excellent excuse for a silence for which most people are grateful.

That morning, however, the excuse was wanting, and Mr. Fortescue, who was of the party, committed the error of thinking that the silence in which the meal was being discussed had been prolonged beyond the limit of sociability. He clung to a few old-fashioned ideas, and one of these was that people met at breakfast to be agreeable to each other, and to be late for that meal was in his eyes almost as ill-mannered as to be late for dinner.

Mr. Fortescue had devoted the whole of a long life to society. Most people attain distinction by reason of their positive qualities; he had achieved distinction of a certain kind by his negative ones. He had made the study of society his profession, for

the few years during which he had been a Foreign Office clerk had been merely a period of training for the real business of his life.

Nobody could exactly explain why Charlie Fortescue was a welcome guest at every social gathering in London during the summer, or why, from the Goodwood week at the end of July to the meeting of Parliament in February, he had the choice of all the well-known country-houses in the three kingdoms to stay in. Young men who might have been his grandsons called him Charlie and poured their difficulties into his ear, and older men and women sought his advice and assistance in far more serious cases.

Mr. Fortescue was an institution in his particular sphere of society, and there was no possibility of accounting for his universal popularity and peculiar position in the world. He was simply and solely—Charlie Fortescue. He was by no means rich; he was not a sportsman, and not cleverer than his neighbours, except in possessing the gift of never saying or doing the wrong thing, and thoroughly knowing his world.

Mr. Fortescue had never been heard to say an un-

kind or an uncharitable word of anyone, and yet he was commonly supposed to know more family secrets than any other man in England, and to have been the means of saving more than one well-known house from dishonour. Those who knew him best noticed that if any scandal were being discussed, or anyone's conduct criticised, he never committed himself to a definite opinion as to the rights and the wrongs of the case, but neither did he ever damn it by silence. The very tenacity with which he clung to certain old-fashioned ideas and habits gave him a certain distinction in the essentially *fin de siècle* world in which he lived. Anybody else but he who had ventured to retain some of the usages and prejudices of the first half of the century would at once have been ignored as a ridiculous bore, but nobody ever thought of regarding anything that Charlie Fortescue did or said as behind the times. His only vanity was the harmless one of liking young men to treat him as one of themselves, and nothing annoyed him more than when some boy, just beginning life, with a pardonable reverence for his age and social standing, addressed him as

"Mr. Fortescue." Older men were jealous of his well-preserved figure and his fresh and unwrinkled complexion, and insisted that both were procured by artificial means, though his valet could have told them differently, and, moreover, had his complexion been "made up," he certainly would not have made a point of always appearing at breakfast in a country house and sitting with his face towards the windows.

Mr. Fortescue had known Lord Heversham since the latter was a small boy, and had been a friend of his father before him. He had stayed at Heversham repeatedly in its last owner's lifetime, and was one of his executors. The late Lord Heversham, indeed, had frequently confided to him his anxieties concerning the future fate of his title and estates, and had begged him to use any influence he might have with his brother Hugh to persuade the latter to break off his connection with Mrs. Hungerford, and marry. As a matter of fact it had been from Mr. Fortescue that Lord Heversham had learned the few particulars he knew concerning the woman with whom his brother was living. This had been before Edward Lester's

death. Hugh had always been on very good terms with his father's old friend, and had been less reserved with him than with most of his acquaintances. He had occasionally even taken him down to the little villa at Highgate to dine with Mrs. Hungerford, knowing that he was discreet and that he would not make any mischief. Mr. Fortescue had of course taken in the situation at a glance. Though he had wondered very much how his young friend Hugh had managed to pick up so charming a woman, and one who, he felt sure, was a well-bred lady, he had never been able to discover anything of her history. Indeed, he had never made any particular effort to do so, for Hugh, knowing that Mr. Fortescue if once he had promised to hold his tongue about anything, did so, explained to him that Mrs. Hungerford was by no means in the position of a kept mistress, and begged him not to talk about the little establishment at Highgate.

Mr. Fortescue had of course no idea that Mrs. Hungerford was the Cecil White whose books were on the tables in most of his friends' drawing-rooms.

Hugh had kept her secret religiously after he had been made aware of it. It was impossible that it should not become known in the world that Hugh Lester had a friend at Highgate with whom he spent a considerable portion of his time. There are always servants to talk among each other of the doings of their employers, and there are always people who will talk to their servants.

Mr. Fortescue had been as good as his word to Hugh, and in some ways better. When he heard the subject discussed in the world he had allowed the latter to think that it was a simple case of a lady of the *demi-monde* living under Hugh Lester's protection.

As it was, the matter had reached Lord Heversham's ears, and he had applied to Mr. Fortescue as the person upon whom he could most rely to learn the truth from Hugh himself.

Mr. Fortescue's advice to the deceased peer had resolved itself into a recommendation to let well alone, but this of course had been in the days when neither he nor Lord Heversham could foresee that the latter's youngest brother would become his heir. After Ed-

ward Lester's death, Lord Heversham had, as has been said, exhorted Mr. Fortescue to use all his influence to try and get Hugh to break off his connection with Mrs. Hungerford, and Mr. Fortescue had tried his best to do so, knowing how much was at stake. He had not been successful in his efforts, and Hugh had rather avoided him up to the time of his eldest brother's death and his consequent succession to the title.

Not long after this event occurred, Hugh had come to see Mr. Fortescue at the latter's rooms in the Albany and had confided to him the situation in which he found himself. He had felt that this old man of the world would give him sound advice, and he was grateful to him for the way in which he had kept his promise and had not talked about Marjory except in the most discreet and useful manner.

Mr. Fortescue was amazed when he heard that Hugh's mistress had left him at the very moment when he had become a peer and a very rich man. His experience of women, which dated from some fifty years back, had furnished him with nothing at

all similar. He had never been married himself, but he had been behind the scenes of the making and unmaking of many marriages, and at the twisting and untwisting of many entanglements that were not marriages. He certainly did not remember any other case of a woman leaving a man who had just succeeded to forty thousand a year, and Hugh's story interested him exceedingly. At seventy it is probable that new experiences in life are luxuries, and that they make a man feel young again. Mr. Fortescue's experience of women was that if they did not understand money, they understood very well what money could give, and he wondered very much why Mrs. Hungerford should leave her lover. That he was her lover still, and that the break-up of their long connection was no doing of his, he felt convinced, for Hugh had been perfectly open with him on the subject.

It was characteristic of the man who had lived all his life in the world that the truest and most simple solution of the problem as to why Marjory Hungerford had acted as she had done, was the only

one which he dismissed from his mind as too improbable to merit consideration. Hugh had endeavoured to make him believe that it was love for him which had prompted her action. Mr. Fortescue thought that it was much more likely to have been prompted by love for somebody else. He could not help acknowledging to himself that a love which sacrificed the prospects of at least sharing in the advantages of forty thousand a year, if not of acquiring a legal right over a portion of it, was a very rare article.

But whatever might have been the real cause of Mrs. Hungerford's disappearance, Mr. Fortescue felt that it was a very timely one, and when he heard of the promise that Hugh had made to his brother, he said all he could to induce him to fulfil it with as little delay as possible.

He had been quite as much surprised, however, at Hugh's choice, as the rest of the world had been; neither had he known any more about the present Lady Heversham before her marriage than the vague facts which everybody knew concerning her parentage. When he had seen her for the first time after her

presentation at Court as Lady Heversham, and Hugh had introduced him to her as a very old friend of his own and of his family, the elderly bachelor, who all his life had looked upon woman more in the light of necessary evils than as anything else, had quite fallen a victim to her beauty and charm of manner.

Knowing the past, he wondered if she would be happy. Muriel Heversham's kindly reception of her husband's old friend gained her a very stanch ally in Charlie Fortescue, and one who was destined to do her great service. A closer acquaintance with Hugh's wife only confirmed his first impression of her, and he became her enthusiastic admirer and loyal friend.

The party assembled at Heversham for Whitsuntide consisted only of Mr. Fortescue, a county magnate and his wife,—Mr. and Mrs. Heylands, of Grey Scaur, as they liked to be called and always put upon their visiting cards,—Lady Peebles, who was Lord Heversham's aunt, and her daughter, and Violet Goring, whom Lady Heversham was going to take out that year in London and who was, therefore, living with her sister and brother-in-law.

348209

With the exception of Miss Goring, who, like her relations, preferred the continental fashion of breakfasting quietly in her own rooms, the whole party were sitting at breakfast that morning, but the conversation, except for a few remarks on the beauty of the weather, which for Westmoreland was really unusually fine, had not been particularly exhilarating. Mr. Heylands had no desire to talk, being fully occupied with the disposal of a meal which had begun with porridge and cream and continued by easy gradations through *rognons sautés,* broiled ham, eggs, and several slices of *galantine,* washed down by various cups of coffee. The ladies preferred the view of the pictures on the walls of the room to that of the garden, and only Mr. Fortescue and the Westmoreland squire sat with their faces to the light of the spring morning.

"I consider that our host and hostess are very lazy people to stay in their rooms on a morning like this," remarked Mr. Fortescue, wishing to break a silence which he felt had become almost impossible.

"I suppose that Hugh cannot get out of his

bachelor ways," said Lady Peebles, "and Muriel and Violet have both learned the habit of breakfasting upstairs from having been so much abroad. A nasty, stuffy habit, I call it," she added, "but it seems to be becoming the fashion in England also."

"I never could accustom myself to foreign ways," said Mr. Heylands, rising as he spoke to help himself from the dishes on the side-table, for Lady Peebles had told the servants not to wait. Mr. Fortescue looked amused. "No," he said, "I shouldn't think they would suit you. Yours is not quite the frame to be supported by a roll and a cup of coffee till luncheon time," and he glanced at the north-countryman's tall, stalwart figure. "The absence of three people reduces our little party considerably," he added, and there was a little touch of grievance in his tones. Mr. Fortescue really preferred a house in which people assembled in a drawing-room before breakfast and went in together when the gong sounded.

"We are to have an addition of two very shortly," said Lady Peebles.

"Who are coming?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"The George Wollastons," answered Lady Peebles, and she made a little face.

Mr. Fortescue said nothing, but he slightly raised his eyebrows,—a trick he had when people whom he did not like, or disapproved of, were mentioned.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Heylands, "are the Wollastons really coming? I am so glad. I have always wanted so much to meet them."

"Really? I wonder why!" said Lady Peebles.

She did not wonder at all. Mrs. Heylands of Grey Scaur was a good creature, but naïvely vulgar. She made no secret of liking to make the acquaintance of people whom she thought smart, and everybody knew that Mr. and Mrs. George Wollaston were very smart indeed.

"One never takes up a society paper without seeing their names," she answered. "I have always heard that they were charming people. I suppose they are old friends of Lord Heversham's."

"George Wollaston is a nephew of mine," replied Lady Peebles; "his mother was my sister."

"But Mrs. Wollaston is one of the smartest women

of the day, is she not, Lady Peebles? I always like meeting the people who are being talked about, it is so interesting, I think," continued Mrs. Heylands.

"I'm afraid that I am not a good judge of what is called smart," said Lady Peebles, smiling at Mr. Fortescue. "I never was smart myself,—at least, certainly not like Mrs. Wollaston."

Mr. Fortescue was beginning to enjoy his breakfast. He could remember the time, not so many years ago, when Lady Peebles was one of the greatest ladies in London, and when her house was a political and social centre. But he agreed with her when she said that she had never been smart.

Mrs. Heylands looked doubtful.

She was thinking to herself that, after all, a dowager Marchioness was not necessarily a fashionable person, and she did not see Lady Peebles's name in print nearly so often as she saw that of Mrs. Wollaston.

At that moment Muriel Heversham appeared outside the windows of the breakfast room accompanied

by two collies, whom she was taking for their morning walk."

"Are you still at breakfast?" she called to them. "I have been out for the last hour with the dogs. It is too delicious this morning."

"Mr. Fortescue has just been saying that you were very lazy!" said Lady Peebles, laughing.

"And Lady Peebles that you had nasty, stuffy habits, Lady Heversham," added Mr. Fortescue.

Muriel laughed also. "When you have all done abusing me," she said, "perhaps someone will come out."

The dogs jumped up about her to draw her attention to the fact that they wished to continue their walk, and Mr. Fortescue looked at her from his side of the breakfast-table and thought how lovely she was in her cool summer dress and picturesque garden hat.

"I will join you in a moment," he said to her, "when I have got my cigar-case; that is to say if you do not mind my smoking,—if you do, the cigar can very well be delayed."

"Please, Mr. Fortescue, do not be sarcastic as

well as abusive," replied Lady Heversham. "After luncheon you shall give me one of your cigarettes as a peace-offering, though I know that you do not approve of women smoking."

In a few moments he joined her in the garden, and they strolled together towards the wooded banks of the river, which were teeming with the joyous life of spring. The waters of the mountain stream sparkled and danced as they hurried from the hills to the sea, over boulders of rock and broken shallows, now gliding beneath bushes of laburnum and hawthorn whose blossom-laden boughs nearly touched their surface, and now hurling themselves over some masses of limestone crags rising up from the bed of the river. From the trees above came the soft purring note of the stock-doves and the song of innumerable birds. Heversham was a perfect paradise of wild life. In the grounds immediately around the house that enemy to Nature, the modern gamekeeper, had never been allowed to work his ignorant way, and they were kept as a sanctuary for all living creatures.

The collies tore madly along the river banks, now startling a wild-duck off her nest, or causing a water-hen to skurry across the stream, and now sending a kingfisher darting along its surface with a sharp shrill "tweet," its back showing a flash of blue in the sunlight.

Muriel and her companion sat down on a bench under a large weeping-willow, while the latter proceeded to light his cigar.

"Lady Peebles tells me that you expect the Wollastons to-morrow," Mr. Fortescue said presently.

"Yes," replied Lady Heversham; "they wrote and proposed themselves. They are staying in the neighbourhood, and Mr. Wollaston—George, I suppose that I ought to call him, as he is a relation of Hugh's—suggested a visit here on their way back to London."

Mr. Fortescue did not at once answer, but traced little patterns with the point of his stick upon the grass.

"Is Mrs. George a friend of yours?" he asked, at length.

"By no means!" replied Muriel Heversham. "I hardly know her. Between ourselves, I do not think I much cared about her when we met, but really I know her so slightly that I am not capable of judging. She gave me the impression that she did not like me when I first made her acquaintance. I suppose I am not *simpatica* to her. But first impressions are not always to be depended upon, and no doubt we shall get to know each other better now that she is coming to stay here. Do you like her?" she added, noticing that Mr. Fortescue's manner was wholly unresponsive.

He hesitated a little before replying.

"I do not think that she is a person of whom I should make a great friend."

"Which means to say that you do not like her!" said Muriel, smiling.

"Perhaps I also am incapable of judging," said Mr. Fortescue. "Mrs. Wollaston is a modern development of the female sex. There is a class of married women, and I may say a class of married men, which I do not profess to understand, and the George

Wollastons belong to that category. They are the natural products of our age, I conclude—but you see, my dear Lady Heversham, I belong, not to the past generation, but to the one before that."

Muriel looked at him laughingly.

"You are very much up to date, I think, whatever year you happen to have been born in!" she replied.

"Mrs. Wollaston does not think so, at all events."

"Then Mrs. Wollaston is a stupid woman," said Lady Heversham.

"Not at all. Do not make that mistake. Mrs. Wollaston is by no means a stupid woman; she is, on the contrary, a very clever one. Have you ever considered the Wollastons' position?"

"Their position! I don't understand."

"I mean, have you ever wondered how they contrive to do all they do on their income?"

"I do not know anything about their income," replied Lady Heversham. "Of course one knows that they go everywhere and are what our friend Mrs. Heylands would call 'the smartest of the smart.'"

"George Wollaston's income is something under a thousand a year," said Mr. Fortescue, drily. "Possibly he makes another three hundred a year out of the Insurance Company for which he touts. Mrs. George may have two hundred a year,—certainly not more. That makes fifteen hundred a year,—*pour tout potage,*—out of which the lady's dress must cost not less than eight hundred, and probably more."

"She is always beautifully dressed," said Muriel. "I don't know anyone who seems to have new clothes available for every occasion as she has. She invariably wears exactly the right thing."

"Good taste is a very expensive gift when it has to be gratified at all costs," said Mr. Fortescue, somewhat oracularly.

"I can see that you do not like Mrs. Wollaston," said Muriel.

"Frankly, I do not, Lady Heversham. I do not like either of them. It is very ill-bred of me to say so to you of a couple who are connections of yours, and who are about to be your guests."

If Muriel had known her companion longer she would have understood that it was a most unusual thing with him to express himself so decidedly when talking of other people, and especially of people so well known in society as the George Wollastons. It was, indeed, contrary to all the rules which Mr. Fortescue had laid down for his own guidance in life, —rules the observance of which, under all circumstances and with all people, had secured to him the peculiar position which he held in that society to which he was so devoted.

Perhaps he thought he had said too much in this instance, for after a pause he remarked:—

"One can always be friendly with a person without being intimate. Pray do not think that I meant to warn you against being friendly with Mrs. Wollaston, only I am old-fashioned. In my day people of our society did not behave like adventurers, and I cannot become accustomed to the type. Poverty was a misfortune then which more fortunate people commiserated; now it is a crime which they condemn. The result is—people like the George Wol-

lastons. It is more the fault of the age than of the individuals."

"Lady Peebles cannot bear her," said Muriel. "I am very sorry they are coming to-morrow, but it would have seemed unkind not to have them when they are in the county and know that we are spending Whitsuntide here."

"Lady Peebles and I can fall back upon each other and upon our old-fashioned ideas," said Mr. Fortescue, smiling.

"I am not sure that it will not be a trio," laughed Muriel, "for I think that I shall join you; I often tell Hugh that he made a mistake when he married me; I am not at all suitable to the situation."

Mr. Fortescue glanced at her quickly, but his look was a penetrating one. He fancied that he detected a touch of seriousness in the tone of her voice which belied the laugh in it.

"I think, on the contrary, that you are suitable in every way, Lady Heversham; and for goodness' sake don't belittle yourself to your husband. There

is no such mistake in the world as for a wife to do that. Hugh might end by believing you!" and he also laughed as he uttered this remark.

"Mr. Fortescue," returned Muriel, "it appears to me that for a bachelor, you know a great deal about matrimony."

Mr. Fortescue shrugged his shoulders. "Oh," he replied, "as to that, there is a very true proverb to the effect that lookers-on see most of the game."

There was a silence between them after this. Lady Heversham's gaze wandered along the banks of the river, and the two collies, tired of hunting water-rats and moor-hens, came and curled themselves up at her feet. Mr. Fortescue wondered how things would go on at Heversham, and whether the woman beside him who was mistress of the beautiful old house in which he was staying would find sufficient compensation in her possessions and position to console her for the absence of love. Had she found out its absence already, he wondered, or had she known when she married that another woman possessed all the affection which her husband had ever had to give?

He did not know enough then of the circumstances of her marriage to enable him to judge of this. Moreover, there was no use in speculating upon that part of the question,—speculation was for the future. Mr. Fortescue did not believe that the woman existed who would have refused Lord Heversham, and yet—he did not think somehow that Muriel was a person who would have married simply for a title and money. He felt rather annoyed with himself for having any doubts upon the matter. They seemed to him to upset the theories which years of observation of his world had taught him to regard as unquestionable. It annoyed him also that he could find no better reason for thinking that his theories did not apply to Lady Heversham than the lamentably weak and inconclusive one that he did think so.

If she knew herself to be unloved by her husband, young, beautiful, with the world of society at her feet, would Love long be denied an entrance to her heart? He did not believe that she had the making of a "fast" woman in her. It would be better for her if she had, he thought, for there was

always safety in numbers,—especially in a number of lovers. One of Mr. Fortescue's theories was that bad people managed to take very good care of themselves in the world, and that it was only the good ones who, when they fell, hurt themselves severely. Lord Heversham had told him how he had first become acquainted with Muriel Goring. The unceasing attempts made to catch him since he succeeded to his brother had only resulted in disgusting Hugh with London society in general, and he had determined that, as he had to marry, he would not choose his wife from out of it. He would marry, he thought, some quiet girl, brought up in the country, who, though a lady by birth, had not been spoilt by the world. It would be quite enough that she should be able to take her place as his wife and fulfil the primary object for which he married her. He never could dismiss the idea from his mind that Marjory Hungerford might find her self-imposed renunciation of him beyond her power to carry out, and that she might some day consent to a renewal of their old relations. Under these circumstances a provincial

wife might be more manageable than one who had more experience of life. Otherwise it had been more or less a matter of indifference to Lord Heversham whom he might marry, for no other woman would be able to second his endeavours to render life a perfectly harmonious episode as Marjory Hungerford had been able to do. One great advantage in marrying a girl not of the fashionable world was that she would be likely to be more thoroughly contented with her position, and her ideas as to the marriage vow would not be elastic as those of the latter.

The glaring inconsistency of this reflection never struck him. It never, somehow, does strike a man that what is sauce for the gander should, to be consistent, be also sauce for the goose.

Lord Heversham's meeting with the girl he did marry had been like his meeting with Marjory Hungerford, due to a mere caprice of Fate.

It had been late in September when the latter fled from him, and he had endeavoured to trace her whereabouts without the slightest success. She had

disappeared as completely from his life as if she had died, and, indeed, more so.

He had been to her publishers and asked for Mr. Cecil White's address, but those gentlemen had declared that they did not know it. They had not heard from Mr. White, they told him, since the end of September, when they had received a letter from him stating that he was ill and going abroad for rest, and begging that any business communications might be kept for him until he should write again. He had not given any address, and they had not again heard from him.

Similar unsuccess awaited him at Mrs. Hungerford's bankers. They knew that Mrs. Hungerford was abroad, but had no idea as to her whereabouts. No word from her came to him. The few lines which she had left for him at Highgate were the last she wrote to him.

Hugh had spent the autumn and early winter months at Heversham. The game had to be shot, and he occasionally asked a few men to shoot it; otherwise he remained alone, occupied only with his

own thoughts and a passionate regret for the woman whom fate had driven out of his life; regret, too, for the collapse of the pleasure-house so carefully built and maintained.

In December he had gone to Paris, and after the New Year had thought that he would go down to the Riviera. The time had come, he felt, to rouse himself from thinking only of the past. He must begin to mix again with his fellow-creatures and look out for the woman whom he must make his wife.

On his way to the south he broke his journey by sleeping a night at Marseilles. Everybody who has been to the Riviera knows the scene of confusion which takes place daily at the Marseilles railway-station on the arrival of the two morning *rapides* from Paris, owing to the strange reluctance of the P. L. M. officials to provide sufficient accommodation for travellers. Lord Heversham had found himself at the station just as the train was entering it. Having sent his servant direct to Nice with his luggage, keeping by him only a dressing-bag, he had not hurried himself to be at the station until the hour at which the

train was due. The consequence was that he was unable to find a seat, and as the porter who carried his bag assured him that an extra carriage was about to be put on, he stood on the platform waiting. The extra carriage, however, only existed in the imagination of the porter, and the cries of *"En voiture—en voiture, s'il vous plait,"* warned him that the train was about to start. All at once an official threw open the door of a compartment and exclaiming, *"Montez, montez donc, monsieur,—on va partir!"* seized him by the arm and hustled him into it, and his bag was almost thrown in after him.

When he had recovered his breath and his temper, Lord Heversham became aware that the compartment was occupied by three ladies, and, worse than this, that it bore the label *"Loué."* He was profuse in his apologies for his untimely intrusion, but, as the train was already in motion, to get out was impossible, and he could only assure the eldest of the three ladies that when it stopped at Toulon he would relieve them of his presence. She, good-naturedly, declared that it was no intrusion, and that he had far better re-

main where he was as the train was so crowded. They had reserved the compartment at Paris, she explained to him, in order to insure being alone during the night; now that this was over his presence was not the slightest inconvenience, and she begged that he would make use of one of the vacant seats.

Lord Heversham noticed that this elderly lady had all the remains of having been a very pretty woman, and of the two younger ones, who were evidently her daughters, that one was a strikingly beautiful girl. People do not look their best as a rule after a long night journey, but this girl looked as fresh as if she had just left her room. Hugh thought that he had never seen such beautiful dark blue eyes and regular, finely chiselled features. She had taken off her hat, and he could see a wealth of soft, dark-brown hair piled up on her head, a few stray curls of which had escaped and were clustered on a low broad forehead, bringing into relief the brilliancy of her complexion.

Perhaps what struck him most was the exceedingly high-bred look of the girl, and the graceful way she

carried the little shapely head, which was set so well upon her shoulders.

He was curious to know who they were, and at last his eye fell upon the label of a bag in the rack opposite to him, on which the words, "Mrs. Goring, Villa des Rochers, Mentone," was written.

The name of Goring was unfamiliar to him. He had never known anyone so called, and he began to search about in his memory to find a possible clue to them. That his fellow-travellers were ladies was very evident. When the train stopped at Toulon, he made a further offer to change his carriage, but Mrs. Goring pressed him not to do so, and pointed to the crowd on the platform waiting to get into the express.

"Unless you feel that you cannot face a five hours' journey with only ladies in the compartment!" she added, smiling, seeing that he still hesitated.

The train stopped twenty minutes for breakfast, but Mrs. Goring and her daughters did not get out of the carriage. The girl whom Lord Heversham thought so handsome gave some directions in French to a maid who came to the window, and he was

struck by her perfect fluency and accent as she spoke. It was not the French of the schoolroom, but of one who had evidently lived much with French people and had talked the language from childhood. That particular intonation of the voice which, even when their grammar is perfect and their accent irreproachable, foreigners, and especially English people, can hardly ever acquire when talking French, was particularly noticeable in Miss Goring's speech, and Lord Heversham envied her the possession of it.

His companions furnished him with another reason for concluding that they had lived or travelled much out of England, for instead of sitting and eyeing him with the air of cold, suspicious dislike with which the English generally regard a fellow-traveller with whom they are not acquainted, all three of these ladies talked with each other and included him in their conversation. Mrs. Goring was the most communicative of the party. They were going to Mentone, she told him, where they had a villa. Lord Heversham asked them if they had had a good crossing when they left England, but Mrs. Goring's an-

swer confirmed his idea that they had lived much abroad.

"I have not been to England for many years," she replied, and then explained that during the latter years of her husband's life he had been a great invalid and quite unable to stand the damp climate of England, and that she herself from living abroad so much had become unable to endure its constant changes.

The journey between Toulon and Nice, which was Lord Heversham's destination, was passed in conversation upon all sorts of topics, and when he bade his companions farewell and left them to complete the remaining few miles of their journey to Mentone he felt on quite friendly terms with them. Mrs. Goring expressed a hope that if he were in Mentone he would come and see them. Anybody would direct him, she told him, to the Villa des Rochers—it was in the east bay—or, if he forgot the name of the villa and asked where Madame Goring lived it would be the same thing, for she was well known there as a resident.

"Now I have told you my name, you will not ob-

ject to let me know yours," she had said, with a gracious little smile.

Hugh told her that his name was Heversham.

"Lord Heversham, is it not?" she asked, for she had seen the letter "H" surmounted by a coronet stamped upon the cover of his dressing-bag, which had been hurled so unceremoniously into the carriage at Marseilles.

"Yes," Hugh replied.

"Mentone is not an amusing place for a man," Mrs. Goring resumed; "but if you are there do not forget us. We shall be delighted to see Lord Heversham, shall we not, Muriel?" she added, turning to her beautiful daughter, as though inviting her to second her invitation.

"Of course!" replied Miss Goring; "but probably Lord Heversham does not care for bath-chairs and tubercles,—these seem to be the things upon which Mentone thrives."

Hugh declared that he should certainly be in Mentone as he had some friends there, and that he should not fail to come and call at the Villa des

Rochers. Something in the tones of Miss Goring's voice caused him to look at her. The words, though they were spoken laughingly, seemed to imply that Mentone did not satisfy all the speaker's desires in life.

From the daughter his glance travelled to the mother, and an expression came into Mrs. Goring's eyes as her daughter spoke which made him wonder whether she was quite as amiable in the family circle as she appeared to strangers. The German definition —*Strasse Engel, Haus Teufel*—came into his mind, and he wondered if Mrs. Goring were one of these.

He went to Mentone, and called on the Gorings at the Villa des Rochers. It had not been difficult to find out all about them, for Mrs. Goring had been perfectly correct in saying that she was well known as a resident there. Hugh happened to know a doctor who practised at Mentone in the winter months and who had attended his sister-in-law for many years before her death. From him he learned all there was to know about the Gorings. They were perfect gentlefolk and Mrs. Goring was very well off; but, his friend

informed him, she was a very odd person and sometimes very disagreeable to her daughters. The doctor's opinion was that she was a very vain woman, who would have liked to secure a second husband and was jealous of her girls, and especially of the elder one, Muriel, whose beauty was so striking. She rarely took them anywhere, and they led the quietest and most retired of lives, their mother absolutely refusing to go to England, on the score of her health, which, the doctor asserted, was as good as his own. Both daughters were charming, he declared, and the elder one, Muriel, might marry anybody she chose if she were only seen and known in the world.

Lord Heversham listened and was interested. Surely, he thought, this was the sort of woman he was looking for. Here was a girl who was beautiful, well born and educated, unspoiled by society,—everything, in short, which he had determined to seek for in a wife.

He went and paid his visit at the Villa des Rochers and Mrs. Goring was all cordiality. She pressed him to come again, and indeed gave him a

standing invitation to luncheon whenever he chose to come over to Mentone. The more he saw of Muriel Goring, the more he thought that, as he had to marry somebody, he could not do better than marry her. After a time she seemed to like to talk to him and to be glad when he came to the house. If Mrs. Goring were jealous of her daughter she certainly did not show it in this instance, for she encouraged Lord Heversham's visits and did her best to throw him and Muriel together. At last he asked Miss Goring to marry him, and to his surprise and dismay she refused. She had not known him long enough, she told him, nor was she sure that she liked him sufficiently to marry him—he must give her time. In the end, when after some weeks had elapsed he asked her again, she accepted him.

Once having taken the plunge Hugh was feverishly anxious that the marriage should take place without delay. There was nothing to wait for, and as Mrs. Goring was so averse from going to England it was decided that they should be married in the English church in Mentone, and at the British Consulate at Nice.

Hugh Heversham's settlements on his wife were on the most generous scale. He felt that if he could not give her love he would give her everything else that it was in his power to give. He was much older than she was, and in all human probability she would long outlive him,—she might very likely be still a young woman when he died.

Muriel Goring had not married Lord Heversham for his title or his money. Her mother, who had systematically snubbed every man who showed the slightest interest in or admiration for her eldest daughter, had pursued a very different line of conduct with Hugh. Probably she felt that the opportunity for Muriel to make such a good marriage should not be thrown away. Muriel had seen so few men, except those she had met on the rare occasions when Mrs. Goring could be prevailed upon to take her to some party or dinner at Mentone, that it was not to be wondered at if she had soon discovered that she really cared for Lord Heversham. He appeared to be so anxious to please her, and it was a new experience to her to have a man about her to whom

she was allowed to talk freely, and to whom her mother did not send out word that she was not at home if he ventured to call. To be sure she thought she would have preferred him to have been a little nearer to her own age. It was rather like marrying one's uncle, as a French friend of hers had done.

Both her mother and sister had been intensely annoyed with her when they discovered what had happened.

Violet's annoyance was the result of a bitter disappointment, for she had seen in her sister's marriage a possible deliverance from a perpetual succession of winters at Mentone and summers in a remote Normandy watering-place, which was the life to which Mrs. Goring condemned her two daughters. Violet was devoted to her sister, and longed to see her in some such position as she would have if she married Lord Heversham. She made no secret of her opinion that Muriel would make a fatal mistake if she did not reconsider her refusal to marry him. Her sister's arguments, coupled with Mrs. Goring's disagreeable comments, and the knowledge that her mother would

probably retaliate upon them both by making their lives yet duller and more secluded in the future, all combined to make Muriel feel that she had acted both foolishly and selfishly, and—as her mother put it—like a romantic schoolgirl, in refusing a man who was evidently anxious to marry her and for whom she felt capable of entertaining a sincere affection, simply because he was not five-and-twenty and an ardent lover.

So, when Hugh asked her a second time if she did not think that she could care for him enough to marry him, she had told him that she felt she could, and in a few weeks from that time she had become his wife.

Mr. Fortescue wondered, as he gently puffed at his after-breakfast cigar and watched the wreaths of smoke floating away and dissolving themselves in the air, how much the woman on the bench beside him realised that there was an affection in the world other than the tranquil, passionless one which seemed to exist between her husband and herself.

He was aroused from his thoughts by the sound of her voice.

"Mr. Fortescue," she said, rising from the bench as she spoke, "I must return to my duty, and see what everybody would like to do to-day. As it is so fine, I thought that after luncheon we might all drive up Kentdale—it is a very beautiful valley, and we will have tea at an old farmhouse. What do you think? It will be as well to go to-day, for to-morrow we shall have the Wollastons to consider, and I do not imagine that Mrs. George cares much for scenery."

"And still less for farmhouses," replied Mr. Fortescue, as he rose and accompanied her towards the house; "though," he added, laughing, "she is supposed to be much interested in stock,--but it is not of the four-legged kind!"

CHAPTER IV.

"I NEVER saw a man so obviously bored with matrimony as Heversham," remarked Mrs. George Wollaston.

She was standing ready dressed for dinner, and talking to her husband through the open door of his dressing-room, where he was engaged in a final struggle with his white tie. Mrs. Wollaston's maid and Mr. Wollaston's valet had finished their duties, and the newly arrived guests at Heversham were left alone to discuss their host and hostess before going downstairs to eat the dinner with which the latter would provide them.

"He was an ass to marry—confound the thing!" came from the other side of the door.

Mrs. Wollaston laughed. "Confound what thing?" she asked, "marriage? At anyrate you haven't made such a bad business of it, George, so you needn't complain."

"I was confounding my white tie, not my marriage," explained her husband.

"There is a point of similarity between the two," said Mrs. Wollaston, giving a few final touches to her hair before the cheval-glass as she spoke.

"What do you say, Adela?"

"You sometimes make a mistake and untie both."

George Wollaston burst out laughing. His wife amused him exceedingly, and they were on the most excellent terms with each other.

Somebody had described Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston as an unlimited liability company, and the definition was by no means a bad one. When they had taken each other "for richer, for poorer," there had been a mental reservation on the part of both that it should be "for richer" only. Marriage for them had come to mean a business partnership in a concern which existed for the purpose of getting all there was to be got out of society. They had not entered into the state of matrimony with that intention, perhaps, but in the struggle to live as they wished to live, and as they saw others round them living, they had drifted

into it. Mrs. Wollaston had been one of a numerous family, a daughter of an impecunious peer, and she had married George Wollaston, who added to his slender income by any means which presented themselves to him that did not entail a prolonged absence from his clubs and from the neighbourhood of Piccadilly.

He had been a wine-merchant,—or, more correctly speaking, he had been paid a percentage on the orders he brought by means of his social connection to a firm of wine-merchants desirous of securing West End clients. Becoming aware of a marked diminution in his dinner invitations, and a tendency on the part of the members of his different clubs to remember important appointments after they had exchanged a few words with him, he gave up the wine-trade and took to urging upon his friends the advantages of insuring their lives. Some of these who had bought his wines thought that he was wise not to run the two businesses simultaneously.

The George Wollastons had not long been married when they discovered that an income which

fluctuated between twelve and fifteen hundred a year was by no means sufficient for the life they intended to lead. They meant to be in what is called—with an appropriate vulgarity of language—"the smart set." Mrs. Wollaston, indeed, had been more or less brought up in it. Her father had traded upon his name for many years, and earned a substantial if precarious income out of the beautiful confidence which the British public has in a lord. For a certain pecuniary consideration, which varied in amount according to the soundness of the speculation, the name of Lord Atherstone was usually obtainable to adorn the list of directors on the prospectus of any new company the promoters of which could afford to pay for it.

"It strikes me that Heversham's bored with his wife, not with matrimony," said Mr. Wollaston, as, having completed his *toilette,* he came into his wife's room. "I'll be hanged if I can understand why rich men ever marry," he continued.

"That isn't the usual idea."

"No, of course it isn't; but it's commonsense all the same. Look at Heversham. He was having a

very good time of it, and on account of some silly sentiment of wanting children to inherit his property he must needs go and marry. It is people like you and I, Adela, who ought to marry, not people with forty thousand a year."

"I don't see your argument."

"It's very simple. Poor people have got to face the world and push their way in it. Two heads are better than one for that business."

Mrs. Wollaston laughed.

"It depends on the heads," she replied.

"I'm talking of sensible people like ourselves,—people who know what life is. Of course, matrimony on sentiment and twopence a year, with an annual baby—" His wife turned to the dressing-table and took up her fan and a pair of gloves.

"My dear George," she said, interrupting him, "if everybody held, and carried out, our ideas on these subjects, there soon would be no people left in the world to marry each other. It is time to go down to dinner. For goodness' sake try and be civil to old Peebles,—she is a ghastly old frump, but one

never knows when these old women may do one a bad turn and it's always better to keep in with them. I will make myself agreeable to Muriel Heversham."

"Better make yourself agreeable to him," said Mr. Wollaston, following her out of the room.

"That will follow in due course. I want to make friends with her. She don't like me. Peebles has been saying things, very likely—and that old tabby Fortescue. We have fallen among thieves;" and with a little laugh she descended the slippery old oak staircase leading into the hall, across which apartment was a drawing-room in which the remainder of the party were already assembled preparatory to going in to dinner.

Lady Heversham came forward to meet them as they entered the room.

"I warned you that you would only find a very small party," she said to Mr. Wollaston. "Let me introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Heylands,—Mr. Heylands has a charming place the other side of the county—Grey Scaur—and we call ourselves neighbours."

Mrs. Wollaston murmured a few polite words as she shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Heylands, and at that moment dinner was announced.

Lord Heversham liked to have everything around him mounted upon a scale not of display, but of luxurious beauty and comfort. The dinner-table laid for ten persons in the small dining-room was a kind of pledge for the excellence of the dinner which was to be eaten at it. That night, instead of orchids and hot-house flowers, the wild blossoms and fresh green leaves of the woods and hedgerows occupied the centre of the table, so arranged that each delicate flower showed clear and distinct all the beauty of its form and colouring. Instead of silver candelabra and pieces of old plate, an exquisite service of white Dresden china blended harmoniously with the wild flowers. Silver and gold would have marred the simplicity of the decorations. The head-gardener, whose duty it was to superintend the floral arrangements in the house, had arranged the table in a similar way on another occasion; but Lord Heversham had disliked the effect of the plate as being incon-

gruous, and had suggested china in its place. He was not sure, he said, that earthenware, had it been procurable, would not have been more in keeping with the gardener's rustic idea.

Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Heylands and Lady Peebles were the only members of the party who did not properly appreciate the modern refinement of their host's table. Mrs. Heylands felt that to place a lot of weeds upon a dinner-table was almost a want of courtesy to the guests, and came to the conclusion that Lord Heversham was economising in coal and under-gardeners. Her husband did not care what flowers might be in front of him, but would have preferred more substantial food, though he had no fault to find either with the quality or the quantity of the champagne. Lady Peebles considered that a dinner without a white soup and a brown soup, followed by a succession of courses having a white and brown dish in them was not a dinner at all. She detested French cookery because it always made her bilious.

The Wollastons, however, thoroughly appreciated

their food. It was the first time that they had stayed at Heversham in the present *régime,* though they had been there in the days of Hugh's predecessor. Both of them were accustomed to make mental notes of the way in which things were done in the various houses which they visited. For them the human race was divided into two sections,—those who had money to spend and those who had not. No detail in the lives of the former section was too trivial to be studied. Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston regarded a rich man much in the same light as a prospector at Klondike might regard a piece of ground with a view to pegging out a claim. From a careful study of his circumstances and his tastes, and especially of his domestic surroundings, they formed an idea as to whether it would pay to work him.

Adela was a woman who could be all things to all people. The noisy vulgarity which was affected by some of the women of her set was carefully eschewed by Mrs. George Wollaston. She was never coarse, and she was much too clever at her profession to shock people, while nobody could converse

more sweetly with an ecclesiastic than she, if she happened to sit next to him at dinner.

The conversation at dinner that evening, as was natural among so small a party, was general. Mrs. Wollaston exerted herself to be pleasant and agreeable, more particularly to her hostess. She had only met Muriel during the past season in London at balls and parties, where their intercourse had been confined to a few words exchanged in a crowd. She had been already prejudiced against Lady Heversham, for she had declared that Hugh would never marry, and, though she had never known the name of the woman with whom he lived, she knew that he had a mistress to whom he was supposed to have been devoted for several years. The Wollastons had always kept their eye upon Hugh ever since his second brother died, as a person who might some day be useful to them, and Adela Wollaston had thought of him as a rich bachelor cousin who might in the future be worked to advantage. When his marriage was announced she had believed with the rest of the world that his wife must be a person who could be

treated as a mere cipher, and that the reason for which she existed at all was to produce an heir to the Heversham title and estates. When she had first seen Muriel and had recognised her indisputable beauty she had taken an instant dislike to her. Muriel's beauty and the quiet dignity and self-possession of her manners were things which Mrs. Wollaston had not expected to find in her. She had at first been a little patronising in her treatment of the newly married girl whom nobody knew anything about. The young married women of the so-called "smart set" are apt to be almost insolent in their manner to a woman who is not one of their number, especially if she happens to be better looking than themselves and a stranger upon the scene. It is wonderful how many points of resemblance there are between the ways of polite society and those of the poultry-yard.

Adela Wollaston had not been exactly insolent to her husband's new cousin, but she had allowed her manner towards her to resume a kind of tolerant superiority, which Muriel had noticed and very

naturally resented. More than this, Mrs. Wollaston had done her best to set other women against Lady Heversham. These latter, jealous of Muriel's good looks and of the sensation which she had already made in the world, had been fearful lest she should be taken up in quarters in which they looked upon it as their right to reign supreme, and were ready to do her all the harm they could.

Muriel had taken an opportunity to ascertain her husband's views of the Wollastons after her conversation that morning with Mr. Fortescue about them. She had never heard him say much about them one way or the other, but had gathered that he thought his cousin George a clever fellow and his wife an amusing little person who was always very well dressed. Hugh never did express any strong likes and dislikes for people, though he had them. He was either indolently tolerant of the weaknesses of others or indifferent to them, as the case might be. People's lives were their own affair, according to his theory, and he only wondered why so many of them voluntarily made their lives so unpleasant and inharmonious.

To do him justice, he was always ready to help others out of their difficulties if he could, provided that in doing so he did not bring any disturbing element into his own life.

"How George and Adela Wollaston contrive to get along I don't know," he said to his wife in answer to her inquiries,—"somebody pays up, I suppose. I expect George makes a lucky hit every now and then, and somebody behind the scenes puts Adela on to a good thing. They are in the set, you know, which runs these big capitalists in return for early tips. All the same, they are often, no doubt, in pretty low water; that sort of people must be when anything goes wrong, and then their brains have to be brought into play."

"Your aunt and Mr. Fortescue evidently do not care about them," said Muriel.

Her husband laughed. "Aunt Betty and Charlie Fortescue would like to revive Almacks and be individually invested with the power of the Lady Jersey of those days," he replied. "You can't expect them to understand people of the Wollaston type. Anyhow,

Muriel, be civil to Adela; after all, they are cousins, and I often think the family has been rather disagreeable to them. They can't help not having much money,—at anyrate, both of them try to remedy the defect!" he added, laughing again.

Muriel was determined, after having had these few words with her husband, to do her best to atone for any want of cordiality upon her part towards the Wollastons on the occasion of their former meetings, and finding that Mrs. George was evidently disposed to be friendly, she was quite prepared to meet her half-way. It was not at all difficult to do this, for Adela Wollaston made herself extremely pleasant not only to her host and hostess but also to the whole party. Even Lady Peebles thawed in her manner towards the young couple, and was obliged to confess that Adela was certainly a very agreeable person, and that, whatever she and her husband might say or do in other houses, their conduct at Heversham was all that it ought to be. Mrs. Wollaston was almost deferential in her manner to the dowager whom she designated in private as "a ghastly old frump," and

even went so far as to deprecate the vulgarity and want of refinement of the day to her, and it was only owing to a sarcastic smile which she thought she detected upon Mr. Fortescue's usually well-controlled features that she changed the topic of conversation. Lady Heversham could not help contrasting the perfectly friendly and natural accord which seemed to exist between George Wollaston and his wife with the more formal and reserved terms which existed between herself and Hugh. Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston evidently understood each other thoroughly, and in this supposition Muriel was perfectly right. They gave the impression of a couple who were on excellent terms with each other and who had made up their minds to face the difficulties of life in a genial and light-hearted way. Only a very close observer would have noticed that there was an underdrift in their conversation which almost imperceptibly flowed back to one invariable theme,—namely, the scarcity of money and the difficulty which those whose position obliged them to live in the world experienced in trying to make two ends meet.

By the end of dinner the newly arrived guests had succeeded in making a distinct impression upon each member of the party. Mrs. Heylands was enchanted with Mrs. George Wollaston. She hung upon her words and studied each detail of her dress. A woman who stayed at Sandringham every year and occasionally dined at Windsor, who was at every smart ball in London and at every well-known race-meeting, whose name was known in Paris salons and Monte-Carlo restaurants, was a being upon whom Mrs. Heylands looked with awe and reverence. But when she found this divinity so charming and easy of access as was Mrs. Wollaston that evening, the awe gave place to ecstatic admiration, and visions began to float before her eyes of invitations to the entertainments of that inner circle of society, accounts of whose doings, chiefly drawn from the imaginations of grooms of the chamber, she read in weekly journals. Her husband was equally fascinated by Mr. Wollaston. Lady Peebles and her daughter were reduced to a state of benevolent neutrality, while Muriel and Violet Goring had qualms of conscience and felt that they

had said unkind things to each other of the Wollastons. Lord Heversham was indifferent; Mr. Fortescue alone remained suspicious and wholly unconvinced. The Wollastons wanted something out of Hugh, he thought: money of course, but in what way they meant to try and procure it he could not guess. He felt sure that they had not proposed themselves for a visit to Heversham without some object in view. It so happened that things had been repeated to him which Mrs. Wollaston had said in London the year before of Muriel, and he distrusted this sudden bid on her part to secure Lady Heversham's friendship.

George Wollaston and his wife retired to their rooms that night very well satisfied with the impression they had made on the Hevershams. The former was in particularly good spirits when he came up again later on from the smoking-room, for he thought he saw his way to doing a little business with Mr. Heylands. Lord Heversham had left the smoking-room early, and as Mr. Fortescue did not smoke at nights, Mr. Heylands and George Wollaston had been

left alone together to play a game of billiards, which the latter had suggested.

Adela Wollaston had quickly discovered the drift of the Heylands' remarks upon the dulness of country life and the misfortune of having a large income which was wasted in Westmoreland and could do so much in London. By dint of her kind and sympathetic manner she led Mrs. Heylands, who thought this smart London lady one of the most delightful people she had ever met, to air all her grievances and confide all her unsatisfied longings to her. Adela Wollaston never committed herself to any definite promises. She played with this would-be worldling as a cat plays with a mouse,—giving her a little encouraging moral pat at one moment which raised her hopes, and a sharp little cuff, in which the claws were distinctly perceptible, the next moment, which crushed them. In the end she sent her mouse away with hopes of future cheese swelling high in her breast.

When her husband looked into her room that night before going down to smoke she called to him and told him to shut the door.

"What's up?" he asked laconically. Smart people do not waste words.

Adela Wollaston laughed. "That Heylands woman is a snob; she wants to get into society."

"If it comes to that, we're most of us snobs," replied Mr. Wollaston, drily.

"Yes; but she is a rich snob."

"Ah!"

"You must find out if her husband's insured his life. If not, he must do so."

"I daresay! but I can't make him insure if he don't want to."

"No—but I can."

Her husband looked at her in surprise.

"Heylands!" he exclaimed. "Why, he's old enough—"

"What an idiot you are, George!" said Mrs. Wollaston a little hurriedly. "Of course I don't mean *that.* Don't you see how simple it is? His wife wants to get into society. Well, I can't get her into it, but I can let her think I can. That don't cost

anything. You must work the husband, and if there's any difficulty I will turn his wife on to him."

"Perhaps he's insured already," said George Wollaston.

"Find out. If he is, we must think of something else. I believe they are rolling in money—those people always are. Anyhow, if Mrs. Heylands wants to get herself into society through us, she must be prepared to part with some of it."

"But you couldn't manage it, Adela, even if she did pay up."

"I could manage enough to satisfy her. One could always get them cards for some of the big squashes, and if she were once in the same house with a royalty or two she would return happy to her native wilds and talk for the rest of her life of how she met the Prince of Wales. Leave her to me, and you work the squire."

George Wollaston looked at his wife admiringly.

"You've always an eye to business," he said, taking up his cigar-case preparatory to going down-

stairs. "You ought to have been a man and gone into the city."

Adela Wollaston shrugged her shoulders. "I'm a woman," she retorted, "and have gone into the West End."

Her husband went downstairs to the smoking-room, pondering how best to approach Mr. Heylands on the subject of life insurance. He knew that north-countrymen were not very easy to get round in matters of money and the men of Westmoreland less than others. Those who have made their money, too, are far more conscious of its value than those who have inherited it—not that Mr. Heylands had himself made his fortune, but he was only one generation removed from the mill-owner who did.

The remainder of the business, he felt, might safely be left in his wife's hands.

Money must be acquired somehow, and that as soon as possible. There was the rent of the house in Bolton Street to be paid, not to speak of sops to be given to the tradesmen and Adela's dressmaker. Ready money was wanted, too, to pay for such things

as dinners and supper-parties after the play at the various restaurants and clubs where terms were cash. Moreover, there was more than one piece of paper bearing George Wollaston's signature in the money-lender's hands which would have to be met. To be sure there was a friend's signature as well to them, but to let another man in was not a game that paid. The Wollastons had other means to which they had more than once resorted, to avoid an extremity.

In the world of to-day, and especially in London, people may talk of their poverty, but they must not show any evidence of it. The Wollastons made no secret of being poor; indeed they rather went out of their way to mention the fact, but there were no traces to be seen of it in their establishment in Bolton Street, and certainly none on Mrs. Wollaston's back. From time to time rumours went about that George Wollaston had made a lucky *coup* in the city, or had backed an outsider, for some race, which came in first. These reports, it is true, would not have borne very close investigation, but the Wollastons were quite aware that nobody would take the trouble to investigate. It is

people's losings in life which really interest their neighbours—not their winnings. The rumours in question, however, were useful. They sufficed to account for some sudden increase in Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston's expenditure, bills duly met by George, cheques to Mrs. George's tradespeople, and, possibly, the presence of new jewels or costly toilettes on her person.

George Wollaston was generally regarded as a very sharp fellow, and people envied him his knack of making money quite as often as they envied him his possession of the pretty and smart wife who spent it.

The few minutes' conversation which had taken place between him and his wife before he went down to smoke had had its counterpart in the privacy of Mrs. Heyland's bedroom, whither she had summoned her husband.

Mrs. Heylands was enthusiastic upon the subject of Mrs. George Wollaston, and implored her husband to do all that he could to make himself agreeable both to her and to Mr. Wollaston.

They were such useful people to know, she said; anybody whom Mrs. Wollaston introduced in London

could go anywhere and know everybody. She told Mr. Heylands how Mrs. George had as good as promised that if they would take a house in town for the remainder of the season she would get them invitations and put them in the way of having all the nice people. Mrs. Heylands already had visions of entertaining dukes and duchesses, and perhaps royalty itself, and almost saw in her mind's eye the column in the "County Gazette" which would announce that social event to the awe-struck county.

The result of the conversation between the pair had been that Mr. Heylands went to the smoking-room determined to do his best to be agreeable to George Wollaston. He had not his wife's ambition to be in society, but he did yearn to be in Parliament, even if, like the Holy Ghost at the Council of Trent, he had to get there in a carpet-bag. To appear in London under the auspices of people like the Wollastons could not fail to be the means of making him acquainted with many who could help him to gain his object. This idea was subtly conveyed by his wife, who knew that it would carry weight with him.

To George Wollaston's surprise and delight Mr. Heylands, in the course of the game of billiards, alluded spontaneously to his insurance office and asked which one it might be that he was interested in. He had happened to hear Lord Heversham remark that his cousin George, he believed, made a good thing out of his insurance company, and he thought the young man would be more likely to be interested in that subject than in the affairs of the Westmoreland County Council or the fact that he had lighted Grey Scaur by electricity,—topics which he himself would naturally have preferred to discuss.

George Wollaston was not the man to miss such an opportunity of doing a little business, and he had very soon elicited the fact from his companion that the latter had never insured his life in any company. He was so anxious to impress upon Mr. Heylands the advantages of life insurance in general, and those offered by the company which he represented in particular, that he played an abominably bad game of billiards and let his opponent beat him easily.

After the consumption of two or three whiskeys

and sodas mixed according to local taste, and bearing in mind all that his wife had recently impressed upon him, Mr. Heylands, by the time he and his companion had taken up their hand-candlesticks preparatory to going upstairs, had quite come to the conclusion that a man in his position ought to insure his life. He told George Wollaston that he should trouble him for more information upon the subject, which the latter very truly declared he should only be too happy to give him, at the same time reminding him that the sooner business of that kind was completed the more satisfactory it was for the policy holder.

"I believe I've booked the old bounder," he said to his wife on rejoining her.

Adela Wollaston was sitting up in an armchair reading the last novel by Gyp.

"How much?" she asked, as she laid the book down beside her.

"Ah, that I don't know yet. We didn't settle anything definite,—didn't like to look as if it was of too much importance, you know. He said he'd ask me more about it to-morrow."

"How did you manage to bring the subject up?" inquired Mrs. Wollaston.

"Started it himself; asked me which my company was."

Adela Wollaston nodded. "I see," she said; "his wife's been telling him to make himself pleasant to you. I expect it will be all right."

"I hope to God it will," ejaculated her husband; "we're in a pretty tight place, Adela."

"I know that, but we've been in tighter. George," she added, suddenly, "I've an idea that there's something to be worked here besides old Heylands' life insurance."

"Heversham, do you mean? Won't do. He knows too much about us; besides, he's got a wife now, and a very pretty one."

"Exactly!" responded Adela Wollaston.

"What's your idea?" asked her husband, looking at her curiously.

"I don't quite know—yet; I believe that Heversham's bored to death with his wife, and there was always another woman, wasn't there?"

"Yes—for years."

"What's become of her?"

"I haven't the least idea. Hugh always kept her very dark. She wasn't one of the profession, I believe; clergyman's daughter, probably—now a governess—they mostly are. I don't see what you're driving at, Adela."

"Neither do I—but I mean to make friends with Heversham and Muriel. I've an idea that there may some day be a row in this establishment, and 'it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good,' as they say."

"And you want to brew up the row?"

"Don't be rude, George, and go to bed; I'm tired," replied Mrs. Wollaston. "If anybody brews up the row, as you call it, it will probably be Muriel, —or the other woman," she added, yawning.

CHAPTER V.

THE excursion into the valley of Kentdale which Muriel Heversham had suggested on the day previous to the arrival of the Wollastons had not after all been undertaken. Lord Heversham had reminded her that it was a Bank Holiday, and that the roads would be given over to "trippers," whom the fine weather would entice from the surrounding manufacturing towns to spend Whit-Monday among the Westmoreland hills and lakes.

Mrs. Wollaston had expressed herself delighted with the idea of a long drive into the hills and tea at the farm, which had once been an old manor-house. She hated the country, and quite agreed with the French cynic who said that the sole disadvantage possessed by towns was that they were surrounded by it. It was quite the right thing, however, to be in the country at Whitsuntide,—unless one was in Paris; and it was a matter of comparative

indifference to her whether she spent her day in the grounds at Heversham or in driving along the roads of the neighbourhood. She had come to Heversham with the intention of making herself as agreeable as possible, and therefore, when Muriel had rather hesitatingly proposed her plan of visiting one of the most picturesque spots in the district, thinking that it might possibly bore Mrs. Wollaston to death, the latter had seconded her proposal with enthusiasm. Adela Wollaston wished to obliterate past impressions which the Hevershams might have received regarding her, but she had not expected to derive any further advantage for the moment from the visit, and had merely wanted to see how Hugh and Muriel got on together, and upon what terms they were with each other in their own home. Of this it had naturally been impossible to judge in London; she knew so many couples who were careful to keep up appearances in public.

She had not yet been able to form a definite conclusion on this point as regarded her host and hostess, but she thought that all the affection there was in

their married life was on Muriel's side, though she could not determine the precise amount even of this. It struck her that Hugh was often absent and preoccupied, and certainly his manner towards his wife, though invariably attentive and kind, betrayed none of the *empressement* which might reasonably have been expected from a man who had been married for scarcely more than a year to so beautiful a woman as Muriel. There was a certain courteousness in his manner towards her which in Mrs. Wollaston's eyes was a little too marked, and gave the impression that, conscious of the absence of any deeper feeling, he assumed it to cover the deficiency and render it less observable to the world. It was more, she thought, the manner of an uncle towards a grown-up niece than that of a recently married husband to a young wife, and, like Mr. Fortescue, she wondered how far Muriel was aware of it.

The visit to Heversham, however, had already resulted in immediate and very timely advantages to the Wollastons. Mr. Heylands had come to the conclusion that it would be quite an act of folly on his part

not to insure his life, if only as a provision against the new death-duties. The result of a conversation with George Wollaston, and of several preceding ones with Mrs. Heylands, had been that he had declared his intention of insuring his life for fifty thousand pounds, and had asked Mr. Wollaston to do him the favour of arranging the matter with the insurance company which the latter represented. The percentage on this transaction due to George Wollaston would amount to a very satisfactory little sum of ready money, which would come in most usefully at the height of the London season, when ready money was a much needed article.

Adela Wollaston had not been less businesslike than her husband. Dazzled by the prospect of an entrance into the great world of London under the auspices of so fashionable a godmother as Mrs. George Wollaston, Mrs. Heylands had left her husband no peace until he had consented to take for the remainder of the season a furnished house in Belgravia or Mayfair, large enough for the purpose of entertaining.

Even in this particular Mrs. Wollaston was able to be of service to her new friends and future *protégés*. She knew of the very house which would suit them, belonging to a friend of hers who wished to go abroad. They would have absolutely no trouble in the matter, and be able to move into it just as it was, with the certainty of finding a perfectly appointed residence. Mrs. Heylands was delighted at a plan which obviated any necessity for dealing with house-agents. As Adela Wollaston explained to her, it was so much nicer to have to deal directly with friends in these matters. One was certain of finding what one liked, and it was besides a considerable saving of expense, for the house-agents ran up bills besides pocketing one shilling in every twenty-one of the rent. That this was a consideration more affecting the lessor of the house than the lessee Mrs. Wollaston did not think it necessary to mention, and Mrs. Heylands, who, like all of her sex, loved a petty economy, was delighted at the idea of paying her rent in sovereigns and not in guineas.

The arrangement was equally satisfactory to Mrs.

Wollaston, who saw her way to getting a commission on the affair from both parties concerned. One of the many privileges assumed by our English aristocracy is that when it takes to business it does not consider itself as bound by any of the trammels of professional etiquette.

One stipulation only was made by Mrs. Wollaston in the matter. It must not be known that she was, so to speak, bringing Mr. and Mrs. Heylands out in the world, and she enjoined the latter to secrecy on the subject. She explained that it would never do for the matter to be talked about before it was an accomplished fact; Mrs. Heylands must be guided entirely by her, and trust her to arrange everything for the best. One of Adela Wollaston's most useful weapons was a kind of convincing frankness which she knew how to adopt on certain occasions.

"My dear creature," she said to Mrs. Heylands with a charming little laugh, "all you and your husband will have to do is to hold your tongues and write the necessary cheques. Leave everything else to me. Of course, what you want can't be got with-

out money—but you say you have plenty of that. Well, you supply the money, and George and I will supply the people. It is like the advertisement of the Kodak—'you press the button, we do the rest.'"

"It's no use consulting people like the Hevershams about this sort of thing," Adela told them; "and of course old Lady Peebles is a century behind the times and can be of no use to anybody. People who have a great position of their own naturally can't be expected to understand. Besides, you may be a duchess nowadays and only be regarded as a tiresome woman and asked to dull parties, and you may have made a fortune in spirits and public-houses and dine at Marlborough House."

Mrs. Heylands felt that she could not do better than trust to this frank, outspoken woman of the world, and assured Mrs. Wollaston that neither she nor her husband would mention the fact that she had offered to help them in London.

Adela declared that she would write to her friend whose house she knew she could procure for so good a tenant as Mr. Heylands, and before the conclusion

of their stay at Heversham she would be able to let them know the terms. Mr. Heylands could easily run up to town to look at the house and settle matters with her husband at his office. Altogether things looked decidedly more hopeful for the near future, and the Wollastons congratulated themselves on the happy thought that had made them propose themselves to so dull a house as Heversham.

As the weather continued fine, Muriel's excursion up Kentdale was arranged for a day in the middle of the week, by which time it might reasonably be supposed that the Whitsuntide "trippers" would have returned to their native haunts. In Westmoreland a little fine weather is a subject for surprise and gratitude, and cloudless days are not to be wantonly wasted.

As the old manor-house at which Lady Heversham wished to have tea was at the head of the valley, and some fifteen miles from Heversham, it was decided to have luncheon earlier than usual and start immediately afterwards, so as to allow ample time for the long drive. Lord Heversham caused a change of

horses to be sent on to a village which lay half-way between the two places, for there were some very steep hills and the road was not a good one. The party had to be divided, and Muriel took Lady Peebles and her daughter and Mr. Fortescue with her in a landau, while the Wollastons, Violet Goring, and Mr. and Mrs. Heylands went with Lord Heversham in a break which he drove himself.

Their way led them through some of the loveliest scenery in Westmoreland. Leaving the wooded hollows, in the midst of which Heversham was situated, the road ascended gradually until the brow of the hill was gained. From this point a wide prospect of country suddenly disclosed itself. Far away to the right a hazy cloud of blue smoke hanging low in the air showed where Kendal lay nestling under the higher hills bordering the Lake District. To the left, an undulating succession of small green fields, divided from each other by grey stone walls and bushy hedgerows, with here and there a wood and coppice, stretched away to the sands of the estuary formed by the Kent and Bela rivers which lay glittering like a

shield of silver in the sunlight, encircled by wooded banks and promontories. Peat mosses showed like brown stains in the midst of the green meadows around them on the low-lying ground at the head of the tidal estuary, and quaint, old-fashioned farm-houses and homesteads, with rough-cast walls and round, ivy-covered chimney-stacks, lay dotted about the valley, surrounded by little belts of fir and oak to protect them from the west winds sweeping up from the sea.

A mile or so beyond the park gates Lady Heversham stopped the carriage at a cottage which stood in its little garden by the roadside.

"If you do not mind waiting a few minutes," she said to Lady Peebles, "I want to inquire after a poor man who is dying of consumption. He worked in the gardens at Heversham for years."

She had brought a little basket containing fruit and strong calves'-foot jelly with her for the sick man.

"Would you dislike very much coming in with me to see him?" she asked of Mr. Fortescue; "the people here think so much of a visit, even from a

stranger, when they are very ill. We should hate it, but they look upon it as an attention!"

Mr. Fortescue said that he should be only too glad to give the dying man any pleasure he could, and he and Muriel entered the cottage garden together. The invalid's wife came to the door in answer to their knock, and her face lighted up with pleasure as she recognised Lady Heversham. She hastily wiped the soap off her hands with her apron before shaking hands with Muriel.

"I hope your husband is better, Mrs. Wilson," said the latter. "We were passing your way, and I wanted to pay him a visit if you think he would care to see me—but you must not disturb him; I can come another day if he doesn't want visitors."

"Oh, my lady, he'll be that glad! He's been fretting terrible at not being fit to be in the gardens this spring. May," she continued, calling to her daughter inside the kitchen, "run up and tell father that her ladyship and a gentleman is here and come to see him—if you'll please seat yourselves in the parlour for a minute or two," she concluded, showing

them into a little room, scrupulously clean, and bright with spring flowers. Photographs of Heversham adorned the walls, and on the chimneypiece were portraits of the late Lord and Lady Heversham as well as of Hugh and Muriel taken after their marriage. "It upsets a house dreadful, does illness, my lady," said Mrs. Wilson, with a mixture of apology and irritation in her voice.

"Yes," replied Muriel, gently, "it is always a trial whenever it comes, but your husband is wonderfully patient, Mrs. Wilson."

"He's that restless sometimes as there's no knowing what to do with him," responded Mrs. Wilson. "I says to May, 'Now May, whatever you do don't you marry a man as is nesh—better be a single woman all your life nor go for to do that.'"

Mrs. Wilson was what the Westmoreland folk call a foreigner, having come out of Staffordshire, and she clung to her native expressions.

Lady Heversham and Mr. Fortescue could but guess at what the term "nesh" might mean, and at that moment the girl returned and said that her

father was quite ready if they would please to walk upstairs.

"You must go on with your washing, Mrs. Wilson," said Muriel, "and not let me interrupt you. May will take us upstairs, and we can only stay a few minutes, for I have left two ladies waiting in the carriage."

They went up the narrow staircase and found the sick man lying in a cheerful little room the lattice window of which overlooked the garden. The summer breeze came through it and faintly stirred the white curtains, and the birds in the orchard without were singing of Spring and Life. Nature is ever heedless of Death—unless, perchance, what we take to be heedlessness on her part is but the fruit of a greater wisdom.

"How are you feeling to-day, Wilson?" asked Muriel Heversham, holding the invalid's wasted hand in her own for a moment or two. "This beautiful weather ought to do you good."

"Thank-you, my lady, I'm much the same—only weaker like. I doubt I'll not see the summer out.

Up to a few days ago I never thought but what I'd get well; but Mr. Fletcher was round last week, and he told me as how the time had come for me to stop thinking about when I'd be up and about again and to think whether I was going to Heaven or Hell."

Muriel gave a slight gesture of impatience.

"It won't do you any good to think about that," she replied very gently. "Leave it to God. Mr. Fletcher knows no more about it than you or I do."

She had seen people far advanced in consumption at Mentone, and knew how in that illness the confidence in recovery usually endures to the very last. It seemed a wanton cruelty to come and destroy the hopes and trouble the peace of a man who had lived the simple life of a country labourer.

The dying man looked at her doubtfully.

"He's a hard man is the parson," he said, after a pause.

"Yes—but God is not hard."

"That's true, my lady. And if I die I won't have to deal with Mr. Fletcher, anyway."

"Certainly not!" replied Lady Heversham emphatically.

"It's many a time as I've thought that, when I've sat listening to him in the pulpit."

Muriel bent over him. "Think it always," she said earnestly, "to the end; God will be the better pleased with you for trusting to his goodness. He is a Spirit, not a revengeful man as the priests represent Him to be."

Mr. Fortescue, looking at the pale face beside him, saw a peaceful, contented look steal over it. The perplexed and harassed expression which the eyes had worn when the man was speaking of his clergyman faded away as he looked up and met Lady Heversham's earnest, tranquil gaze. He hardly understood her concluding words, but they comforted him.

"Thank-you, my lady," he whispered; "you does a man more good with your soft words than the parson does with his hard ones—isn't that so, sir?" he added, appealing to Mr. Fortescue.

"It is quite true," the latter answered, and his

voice was a little husky as he spoke. "Lady Hevershame knows God better than your parson does.—And this is the woman who is called cold and indifferent," he thought to himself.

Muriel changed the conversation. Enough, she thought, had been said on those subjects, and she had forgotten Mr. Fortescue's presence in her anxiety to dispel the darkness with which theology had clouded the sick man's mind.

"I have brought you some grapes and some jelly," she said cheerfully, pointing to the little basket. "Is there anything you fancy that we can send you? I know that when I'm ill I am always wanting something which isn't in the house."

"Well, my lady, I do sometimes think as how I could eat a bit of ham."

"Haven't you got a ham?" asked Lady Hevershame of the girl who was standing by the window.

"Oh, yes, my lady," she replied; and going to the door she called down the staircase to her mother below, "Mother, father says as how he would like a bit of ham."

The answer came up in loud and determined tones.

"May," Mrs. Wilson replied, "you tell your father that if he thinks as how I'm going to cut into the new ham 'afore the funeral he's very much mistaken."

Muriel Heversham and Mr. Fortescue looked at each other in shocked dismay, and then at the sick man in the bed.

"Mother won't have the ham cut into before father's funeral," repeated the daughter in complacent and matter of fact tones.

"Hush!" exclaimed Muriel; "I hear. I will send you a ham to-night," she added, turning to Wilson, hoping vainly that he might not have heard.

He looked at them with a smile which had something of satisfaction in it.

"Ah, my lady," he said, simply, "Jane was always a careful body. She's always been a good wife to me, and never was one to waste even a pig's trotter, let alone spoiling a ham. Tell mother she's quite right, my lass," he added to his daughter; "the ham

will serve for the burying, maybe. It's no use for to waste it before the time."

Muriel rose from her chair by the bedside, and she and Mr. Fortescue took leave of the dying man.

When they had said good-bye to his wife downstairs and were returning to the carriage through the little garden Mr. Fortescue asked Lady Heversham what connection there was between ham and a funeral that Mrs. Wilson seemed to be so anxious to keep the former intact.

"I'm ashamed to say I don't know much of poor people's lives and their ways of looking at things," he added; "you evidently do, Lady Heversham. You comforted that poor fellow in a wonderful manner."

"I know very little either," replied Muriel, gravely; "until I married I had no opportunity of doing so, and I am only beginning to make acquaintance with the people here. It was very plain to me that our Vicar had been pouring his usual doctrines of divine vengeance into poor Wilson's ears. The last time I saw him he was sure that he was going to get well, and talked of the day when he would come back to

work in the gardens. You saw the pained and troubled look his face wore to-day."

"Yes; but—is it right to deceive people when they are dying? Your Vicar probably saw that the man's days were numbered, and wished to prepare him."

"What a preparation!"

"I agree. But you must remember that hell is the strongest weapon which the priests possess. If we believed that God was all goodness to us, we shouldn't trouble our heads much about him, should we? That is human nature. Knowing human nature, the theologians invented hell. It is a childish invention, if you like, and bears on the face of it the stamp of its origin; but it serves its purpose."

"At least it is a weapon which should be used with discretion. What is the good of frightening simple souls like those in that cottage with visions of eternal punishment,—even if the monstrous blasphemy against the goodness and justice of God were true?"

"My dear Lady Heversham," replied Mr. Fortescue, "did you ever hear of a priest using discretion where a dogma was in question? But do not let us

discuss dogmas. I am curious to know about the ham."

"I cannot tell you," answered Muriel. "We will ask Lady Peebles. Of course she has known these people from her childhood. What a dreadful thing to talk quietly of a man's funeral before him like that! Mercifully, he didn't seem to mind, or to regard his wife as at all unfeeling."

"Quite the reverse," said Mr. Fortescue. "He was evidently proud of her housewifely economy. They are very odd, poor people."

"To our ideas. We are shocked at things which they regard as perfectly natural, and they, on the other hand, are shocked at us for saying and doing things which we look upon as matters of course. Mrs. Wilson, now, talked as if she were a hard, unfeeling woman, who only thought of the trouble her husband's illness gave; and yet she nurses him devotedly, and he is so proud of her. That is what makes it so difficult to deal with the poor. Our impulse is to treat them in all things as we should our-

selves; but, if we do, we offend, and very often shock them."

"There is only one thing that can never offend or shock," said Mr. Fortescue.

"And that is?"

"Sympathy, and the gift of expressing it. It seems to me that you have both, Lady Heversham," he answered, looking at her.

Muriel laughed a little. "I'm afraid that I just say what I feel," she replied.

"Precisely!" remarked her companion, opening the gate of the garden for her to pass through into the road.

The carriage was drawn up in the shade of some oak-trees, and they were soon driving away at a sharp trot in order to overtake Lord Heversham, who had preceded them in the break with the remainder of the party.

Muriel asked Lady Peebles if she could explain the mystery of the ham, and related the story of Mrs. Wilson's refusal to cut into the one she had in

the house and the reason which she had given against doing so.

"Yes," Lady Peebles replied; "I think I remember hearing that in this part of the world when a death occurs it is considered quite a disgrace to the family, and a slur on the memory of the departed, not to have a ham ready to be eaten on the return from the funeral. Let us ask the coachman, Muriel; if he is a Westmoreland man, he will know."

Mr. Fortescue poked the coachman in the back to attract his attention.

"Yes, my lady," that functionary replied to Lady Heversham's inquiries, "hams is always eaten after a funeral here. There isn't a family but what wouldn't have a ham on the table for the mourners, even though they weren't nothing else in the house nor likely to be."

"That explains it, you see," said Lady Peebles. "Formerly," she added, "this part of the country abounded in curious old ideas and customs, but now the people have become spoiled by tourists and cheap excursions. They have retained their ignorance and

the prejudices derived from it, and their love of drink, and have lost most of their old traditions. It is the same everywhere, I suppose, in these days; but when I was young the country people were very different."

"Quite true, Lady Peebles," said Mr. Fortescue; "it was the gentry who drank then."

Lady Peebles took no notice of the interruption. "I hate your so-called progress in country districts," she continued. "The middle and lower classes only succeed in adopting the evils which it brings with it, for they have neither the training nor the education to enable them to grasp its advantages."

Another three quarters of an hour brought them to the village where it had been arranged they should change horses, and there they found the remainder of the party waiting for them. From here the road began a long ascent of some two miles, at first gradual, but afterwards becoming very steep as the summit of the hill was approached, whence the descent began into the valley of Kentdale. From this point the views on either side of the road became ex-

tremely beautiful in their own quiet and unpretending way.

Westmoreland scenery must be looked upon as a study of miniature-painting in Nature, for then only will its real beauty, which is that of delicacy, be realised. If the hills are regarded as mountains, the woods as forests, or the tumbling streams as torrents, the whole point of the picture is missed. Even the so-called lakes gain in their effect by being looked upon as placid pools of water, and, as the latter, Windermere itself, which would be ridiculous if regarded as a lake, becomes endued with a certain majesty of its own.

The old building, once a fortified manor-house, added in the sixteenth century to the already existing peel-tower, which was the object of the excursion up Kentdale, stood at the very head of the valley. Immediately behind it commenced a wild tract of moorland, and a loftier range of hills, which had until quite recent times been entirely heather-clad and were the haunt of the grouse and black-game. Latterly,

however, sheep-farming had caused the heather to be largely replaced by rough herbage, though there yet remained many square miles of heather land on which there was a very considerable stock of grouse and a few lingering broods of black-game.

Moor Hall, as the old manor-house was called, was now leased to a sheep-farmer, but a portion of the house contained some curious old rooms, oak-panelled, with wide stone hearths and deep mullioned windows which were used for the accommodation of shooting-parties from Heversham. The late Lord Heversham and his father and grandfather before him had invariably spent the opening days of the grouse-shooting season at Moor Hall, where there were a few bedrooms plainly but comfortably furnished; and in the lower rooms were pieces of old oak furniture of the same date as the manor-house itself. Guns and weapons of ancient make and use adorned the walls of the sitting-room and dining-room. On settles of black oak stood the old leathern black-jacks and bright pewter trenchers, which had served to contain the meat and ale at many a convivial meal in the olden days when the

garrison of the border tower returned to their quarters after some fray with the lawless Grahams from Cumberland, or even, perhaps some skirmish with a band of cattle-lifting Scots from the Debatable Land.

Moor Hall was an ideal spot in which to spend a few quiet days for anyone who loved occasional solitude and country sights and sounds. The grey gabled house with its quaint windows, diamond-paned and enframed in ancient stonework, and its low square tower battlemented and heavily hung with ivy, stood out from a background of fir-trees and stunted oaks, while in front of it and on each side stretched away an endless succession of heather-covered fells and green valleys. In August the air was sweet with the scent of the heather and the fragrance of the wild thyme, and the only sounds to be heard were the hum of bees, the low tinkling of the sheep-bells, and the occasional crowing of an old cock-grouse as some ancient wether blundered into his family circle and temporarily broke it up.

It was nearly four o'clock by the time that the two carriages drew up at the gate of the old manor-

house. The farmer's wife came out to meet the party. She had already been informed of their intention to come over to tea by a letter which had reached her by that morning's post, and when Muriel and her guests went into the dining-room they found the long narrow table spread out with every kind of homely delicacy. Scones, girdle-cakes, and home-baked loaves of brown and white bread were in plentiful array, while jugs of rich yellow cream, glass dishes of honeycombs, jams, and jellies stood ready to be eaten with them. Everything was of the very best of its kind, for no bought material can ever compete with that made for home consumption in a well-managed north-country farm. Only the butter was bad, and that was execrable. The native of Westmoreland likes his butter with a taste in it,—and the taste must be a strong one.

Lady Peebles and Mr. Heylands did ample justice to the meal. The former having married a Scotchman appreciated the value of a substantial tea, and Mr. Heylands fairly revelled in the produce of his native county. George Wollaston thought, as he

watched scone after scone disappear down his throat, that he was not a good subject for his insurance company, though personally he did not at all care whether he was so or not. That the company should pay him a good commission on having secured his insurance to them was all that specially concerned him.

After tea they wandered about the old house and admired the oak panelling, and the curious carving of the chimneypieces, in which fruits and beasts of strange shapes were intermixed with the Lester arms and badge. The latter was a spur, figurative of the stirring times when, together with the Grahams from Cumberland, Armstrongs, Riddels, and Percys from Northumberland, the Lesters used to ride in many a border raid into Scotland and along the Marches of the two kingdoms, and sometimes, when not engaged against their common enemy the Scots, fall upon their neighbours' belongings. Moor Hall had been the ancient residence and stronghold of the Lesters before they acquired greater riches and broader lands

and built for themselves a more stately home at Heversham. The evenings at the end of May are long in the north country, and they were able to linger about the picturesque old building and watch the changing lights stealing over the fells, and the shadows of the hills falling gradually across the green valley below them as the sun sank lower towards the horizon. The calls of the shepherds to their collies, and the occasional sharp bark of the latter as they worked the sheep down from the higher ground to less exposed resting-places for the night, sounded from different points of the fell-side.

"I should like to spend a week here," said Muriel, as she sat down and watched the gesticulations of a shepherd whose figure was outlined against the rosy sky, and who seemed to be making himself into a human semaphore for the purpose of conveying his instructions to his dog, who was working a quarter of a mile away from him.

"There is no reason why you shouldn't do so," replied her husband, who overheard her remark.

"You had better come here on the 12th of August, when we begin the grouse shooting."

"Oh, no, not then," said Muriel. "I should like to be alone here and able to explore the moors with only a shooting-pony and my collies. I should be dreadfully in your way; and, besides, all the rooms are wanted for the guns. Some day, perhaps, Violet and I will come up and picnic here for a week."

"After two days of it," said Mrs. Wollaston, "you would probably return to Heversham. Think how dull it would be in the evenings! When I go off on a picnic alone, I prefer going to Aix or Homburg. What do you think, Heversham?" she added.

"I think it all depends upon who shares the picnic," replied Lord Heversham. "I confess that a week at Moor Hall would not appeal to me, unless there were the grouse to occupy me, and three or four men to discuss the day's shooting with after dinner in the evenings."

"You are not a responsive husband," said Adela, lightly. "Of course Muriel expected you to have declared that a quiet week here with her would have

been delightful. That is what I should have expected from you, George, under the circumstances, isn't it?" she added, turning to her husband.

"Oh, of course," replied the latter, drily.

"But I might have continued to expect, you mean?" rejoined Mrs. Wollaston, always laughing. "I am afraid so; husbands are disappointing things."

"Unless they happen to be other people's husbands," remarked Mr. Fortescue.

Mrs. Wollaston stared at him, but his countenance revealed nothing of his meaning.

"I should hardly have thought that you were a judge, Mr. Fortescue," she said to him a little impertinently.

"Of husbands—perhaps not," he replied quietly, and George Wollaston burst out laughing, which made his wife furious. She detested Mr. Fortescue, and had an uncomfortable suspicion that he was watching her narrowly. One never could tell, she thought, how much an old man like Charlie Fortescue, who was in everybody's confidence, knew, or what he might make of his knowledge. She could see that

he both admired and respected Lady Heversham, and she knew that he was always singing her praises in the world.

Lord Heversham hastened to change the conversation. He felt that Mrs. Wollaston had, no doubt, quite unwittingly, touched upon delicate ground, and he had seen that she was evidently annoyed at Mr. Fortescue's remarks.

"If we are to get back to Heversham before dark we ought to be starting very soon," said Hugh, and, calling to a groom who was waiting a short distance off, he bade him have the horses put to and the carriages brought round at once.

"It's not a good road at any time," he explained to his guests, "but in the dark it would be very easy to have an accident, for there are some nasty places and sharp turns."

A redistribution of the party between the two carriages was made for the drive back to Heversham. Muriel and Mr. Fortescue changed places with Mr. and Mrs. Heylands, leaving the latter to occupy the landau with Lady Peebles. They themselves joined

the Wollastons and Violet Goring, whom Lord Heversham was driving in the break. The latter conveyance led the way. The horses attached to it were a powerful pair of chestnuts, which had been recently purchased, and which Hugh, who was fond of driving, intended to drive in a phaeton in London during the summer. They had been bought from a dealer in Carlisle and were a good-looking pair of thoroughbreds, and now seemed none the worse for their pull up the valley, for, with their heads turned towards home, they pulled considerably at starting. Lord Heversham, however, soon steadied them down, and they settled to their work quietly enough. Those inside the break were glad of their wraps and cloaks, for the evening air as they drove through it was cool, and even crisp, on the high ground.

Two thirds of the distance between Moor Hall and the village at which they had changed horses on coming and were to do so on their way back had been accomplished. They were just beginning the descent of the steepest part of the incline, at the foot of which, after the road had taken a sharp turn and

crossed a stone bridge over a little stream, lay the village. The road at this point was bordered by some thick undergrowth. From its midst two or three strayed sheep, alarmed at the approach of the carriage, suddenly sprang out and rushed across in front of the horses. One of the latter swerved violently, and in doing so nearly fell. During its efforts to recover itself a sharp crack was heard, and to his dismay Lord Heversham saw that the pole had snapped and that the broken piece was hanging down and swinging against the flanks of the already terrified animal. After lashing out violently, the horse, which had already successfully regained its footing and would have been easily quieted but for this fresh alarm, plunged forward, and communicating its panic to its companion both tore madly down the long, steep hill. The brake was already on before the horse had shied, and Hugh set his feet and pulled with all his might; but he was absolutely powerless against the united strength of the terrified pair, as the beating of the broken pole against their legs increased their panic at every moment. The groom,

who was on the box beside him, had jumped down the moment he had heard the noise of the pole breaking in order to get to the horses' heads, but the whole thing had occurred so suddenly that before he had time to do so they had bolted, and he was left standing helplessly in the middle of the road, having only just escaped being knocked down and run over.

The carriage descended the hill with fearful velocity, which increased every second. A sharp jarring sound, followed by a metallic snap, warned Hugh that the brake had broken from the strain to which it was subjected.

The occupants of the carriage all kept their heads, excepting Adela Wollaston, who, terribly frightened, would have attempted to jump out had not Muriel, who was sitting next her, forcibly held her down, telling her that she would inevitably be killed if she did so.

Every instant increased their danger, for they were rapidly nearing the bottom of the hill and the bridge, under which there was a ravine of considerable depth, with the rocky bed of the mountain stream

below. If the carriage struck the parapet of the bridge, they must infallibly be hurled over it and dashed to pieces. It was swaying from side to side of the road, and the absence of the brake on the hind wheels had removed the last check on the impetus at which it was travelling, while to attempt to guide the horses over the bridge, which was a narrow one with big stones at the sides of the roadway to protect its parapet, was a sheer impossibility. The driver's hands were already cut and swollen and the muscles of his arms benumbed from the violent strain upon them. There was but one chance left for their lives, and Hugh determined to seize it, if it were only possible to do so.

He turned his head for a second to the occupants of the break. "I am going to turn the horses into the brushwood," he cried to them; "it is our only chance! we cannot pass the bridge."

Slacking one rein he gave one last despairing pull at the other, and fairly wrenched the off horse round. In a second they were crashing into the thick underwood, which fortunately still continued to border the

road on one side. A bit of good luck caused the carriage to wedge itself fast between the stems of two stout young rowan trees, which, though they bent and splintered, stopped its career with a terrible shock and caused it to still maintain its upright position,—though one of the front wheels was torn from its axle. The force of the concussion had thrown the party inside violently together, but, beyond some rather severe scratches and bruises, no one was seriously hurt. Mr. Fortescue and George Wollaston jumped to the ground and went to the horses' heads. The poor beasts were badly cut by the boughs and the splinters of the trees through which they had plunged, but, exhausted from terror and their mad gallop, they lay quiet and prostrate.

"Where is Hugh?" cried Muriel, suddenly, when the first moments of confusion were passed and they discovered that they were all sound in limb.

Lord Heversham was nowhere to be seen, and they looked at one another in perplexed horror. A terrible fear came over them that he might have fallen under the carriage or the horses.

Mr. Fortescue went hurriedly round to the other side of the break, and there, lying motionless a few yards from it, he saw Lord Heversham. In a moment he was kneeling beside him and proceeded to unloosen his collar and necktie, while his sudden exclamation speedily brought the others round him.

Muriel, calm but deathly pale, threw herself on her knees and supported her husband's head on her lap. For a minute or two they all thought him dead, so motionless did he lie and so ghastly white were his features. Mr. Fortescue bent anxiously over him, and, putting his hand inside his waistcoat, felt his heart.

"He is only stunned," he said quickly. "Do not be frightened, Lady Heversham; he will come to in a minute or two. If we could only get some water—ah—Wollaston, run down to the stream and dip some handkerchiefs in it, and bring some water up in your hat if you can."

At this moment the landau came up, having overtaken the groom, who, in terrible alarm, and expecting to find the break and its occupants dashed to

pieces beneath the bridge, had hurriedly related what had happened. The coachman had whipped up his horses and driven as quickly as possible after the runaway carriage. Leaving the footman at the horses' heads, he and the groom hurried to the break and commenced to free the trembling chestnuts from the wreck and to ascertain the damage which they had suffered.

When the carriage had jammed itself between the two mountain-ash trees the shock had hurled Lord Heversham from the high box of the break to some few yards distant, and, as he fell, his head had struck the stem of another tree and rendered him insensible. After some minutes, during which Muriel bathed his face and head with the cold water that George Wollaston had managed to convey from the neighbouring stream, he recovered consciousness.

He opened his eyes and looked with a dazed and bewildered expression into his wife's face.

"Marjory!" he said, in low and distinct tones, which reached the ears of all who were standing round him, "Marjory! such a terrible dream."

Muriel, who was bending tenderly over him, shrank back a little; a slight shiver seemed to pass through her body, and her face, which had been so pale before, flushed as though she had received some sudden blow. A constrained silence followed Lord Heversham's words, and Adela Wollaston's eyes flashed with a keen intelligence. She looked curiously at Lady Heversham. Muriel's face had regained its former pallor; the sudden flush had passed and she bent again over her husband's prostrate form, for after uttering those few words, Lord Heversham had closed his eyes and appeared to have lapsed a second time into unconsciousness.

Mr. Fortescue came to her assistance. He had heard the words, and he knew to whom they alluded, for he had heard Lord Heversham address Mrs. Hungerford by the name of Marjory on occasions when he had dined at the Highgate villa. In Hugh's momentary return to consciousness he had spoken a woman's name, and that not his wife's, while those who knew how long he had been supposed to have lived with some mistress before his marriage could

not doubt but that it was the latter who still held the first place in his thoughts.

"Lady Heversham," he said to Muriel, "you had better leave Hugh to us now. The first thing to be done is to get him home, and we must lift him into the carriage. Had you not better walk on to the village and wait there till we come? Wollaston and I will do all that is necessary, and it would be well if you could send back one or two men from the village to help your groom while we follow you with the landau."

At this moment Lord Heversham seemed to regain complete consciousness, for he sat up and the bewildered look had vanished from his eyes.

"Is anybody hurt?" he inquired, looking round on the little group. "Muriel? where is she?"

He did not notice for the moment that he was lying almost in her arms.

"Nobody is hurt except yourself, Hugh," Muriel replied gently; "you were stunned by the fall from the box, but now you are all right, are you not?"

"Of course," said Lord Heversham, getting onto

his feet. "A nasty spill. Lucky nobody was killed. Another twenty yards and we should have been into the bridge. It was those infernal sheep which did the mischief."

Mr. Fortescue put his hand on his shoulder. "Don't talk, Hugh," he said, "and get into the carriage. There is no damage done except to the break and the horses, and not very much to the latter, the coachman says, beyond some cuts. But you must keep quiet; you've had a nasty fall."

"I don't remember anything about it," said Hugh. "The last thing I recollect is managing to turn the horses off the road into this underwood."

They were still eight miles from Heversham and Mr. Fortescue told the coachman to drive as rapidly as he could without shaking Hugh too much. Muriel insisted upon accompanying her husband and asked Mr. Fortescue to come with them. She felt more confidence in him than in George Wollaston, and though Mr. Heylands was a hunting man and well accustomed to having to deal with accidents, she did not know him so well, and Mr. Fortescue seemed to

be the most obvious person of the three to turn to in the emergency.

Leaving the remainder of the party to walk into the village, where they would have to wait until a carriage could be sent back from Heversham to bring them on, Muriel and Mr. Fortescue drove Lord Heversham off at once in the landau.

CHAPTER VI.

"HEVERSHAM let the cat out of the bag this evening," said Mrs. Wollaston.

She and her husband found themselves alone together for a few minutes after dinner. Muriel had gone to Lord Heversham's room, for the doctor, who had been hastily summoned as soon as they had returned to Heversham after the accident, had insisted on his going to bed and remaining perfectly quiet. The blow on the head which he had received in falling had been a severe one. It had produced a slight concussion of the brain and absolute rest was

imperative. The remainder of the party were sitting in the drawing-room, discussing the accident, and the marvellous escape which those who had been in the break had experienced.

"If it hadn't been for his presence of mind," replied George Wollaston, "it strikes me that we should all have taken our bags and their respective cats to kingdom come."

Adela Wollaston shuddered. "It was terrible!" she said. "I never felt so frightened in all my life. Yes, I must say that Heversham showed great presence of mind, luckily for us. It was curious that he should have come to his senses with that name on his lips, wasn't it? Did you see Muriel's face?"

"Yes," replied her husband, who, except where money was concerned, had a heart. "I was sorry for her; one could see that it was rather a nasty one."

Mrs. Wollaston gave a hard little laugh.

"How wonderfully sympathetic you have become, George!" she said. "I am not the least sorry for her. Of course she didn't marry Heversham, who is almost old enough to be her father, for love. No

doubt she knows more about that woman he lived with than we do, but was naturally annoyed with her husband for coming out with her name before us all in that manner. It must have been a little mortifying, certainly,—said with so much tenderness, too!"

"I don't believe she knew anything about it," replied George Wollaston, obstinately.

"Has she converted you to a belief in female innocence?" Adela asked sarcastically. "Anyone can see that you admire her very much," she added, a little irritably.

"I don't see who was to tell her," objected her husband; "she didn't live in a world that would be likely to know anything of Hugh's life before he married her. Besides, the look on her face was quite enough."

"'Marjory,' he said," remarked Adela, reflectively. "I wonder what the woman's other name is."

"I can't see what it matters. She is probably going by another now; change forms one of the charms of life for that class of woman," answered George Wollaston.

Adela did not reply. She was thinking that it would be amusing to discover the lady who still occupied the foremost place in Lord Heversham's thoughts.

In the meantime the latter's accident, and the doctor's orders that he should be kept perfectly quiet, had rendered it necessary for all those stopping in the house, with the exception of Lady Peebles and her daughter, to offer to curtail their visit by two or three days, and she and George Wollaston had decided to return to London the following morning.

The carriage accident had come as a timely warning of the unexpected risks to which life and limb are daily exposed, and Mr. Heylands was anxious to conclude his insurance without delay. The percentage which George Wollaston would receive from his company for bringing them such a client would amount to a very handsome little addition to the year's income, and, as he had said to his wife, came just in time to get them out of a very tight place. The launching of Mr. and Mrs. Heylands on the waters of Babylon would also result in many advantages,

pecuniary and otherwise, among them being that the George Wollastons would be able to entertain their friends and acquaintances during the season at the expense of their *protégés*, which would mean that their social influence would be increased and their weekly bills diminished.

Adela had not allowed the grass to grow under her feet so far as dealing with the Heylands had been concerned. She had telegraphed to her friend in Park Lane to say that she had got a tenant for the latter's house for the remainder of the season, and had promised that she would secure the house for Mr. and Mrs. Heylands at a rental of eight hundred pounds. The duchess, she declared, asked a thousand guineas for the after Easter season, but as it was a case of letting among friends she did not like to take rent for the month which had already elapsed, and so had reduced the sum.

Mrs. Heylands was delighted at the idea of getting a friendly let from a duchess—it was a good beginning, she thought. The fact of the duchess being a dowager one was a detail, for, as Mrs. Wollaston ex-

plained with a little tremor of amusement in her voice, duchesses who were not dowagers were not given to letting their houses. The thought of eight hundred shillings saved from the house agents was a source of real pleasure to Mrs. Heylands. "So satisfactory, only having to deal with people of one's own class!" she remarked to Adela Wollaston; and the latter agreed with her.

The house in London, and the effort to be made to get into the inner circle of London society, were matters which Mr. Heylands left to his wife. Personally, he would have preferred to remain at Grey Scaur and go into the county town every Saturday to meet his brother county councillors and magistrates and discuss the local affairs with them. He knew, however, that he was a rich man, for like most men of his class he was not living nearly up to his income, and every year some spare thousands were systematically invested. The ambition which he nursed in secret of being able one day to write M. P. after his name alone saved him from sinking into that state of rich and comfortable obscurity which so often char-

acterises the life of the county gentlemen in the north of England, more particularly when they are in the transition stage of casting off the slough of the middle class.

Mrs. Heylands had duly confided to Adela Wollaston her husband's desire to enter politics, and Adela had lost no time in urging George Wollaston to stimulate it. The political views of the two men agreed. Indeed, Mr. Wollaston's views on politics were of so elastic a nature that they always did coincide with those of others.

Later on in the evening Muriel returned to her guests, after having left her husband fairly comfortable. The doctor had declared that no serious damage had been done, and that after a few hours' complete quiet and, if possible, sleep, he would be quite himself again. Altogether, for an accident which threatened at one moment to be a very terrible one, everything had ended very well, and all were loud in their praises of Hugh's presence of mind in successfully attempting to turn the horses off the road before they reached the bridge.

Muriel had got over both the shock of the accident, and the agitation which she had felt at the words uttered by her husband on regaining his consciousness. Not a trace of either remained on her face or in her manner, save that she was, perhaps, a little paler than usual. She was full of apologies both to Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston and the Heylands for the unlucky event of the afternoon which had shortened their visit, but she did not attempt to prevail upon them to remain. The thought that these strangers had been a witness to the scene which had proved to her that her husband cared for some other woman, and that they had probably noticed the agitation which she had been unable to repress, was intolerable to her. She had never seen her husband with other women, or in other society, before she married him, but she dimly guessed that he might be less reserved in his manner than he invariably was with her. He was always kind, always courteous and attentive to her, and ready to please her in every way that he could, but something told her that these hings were not love; they were too formal, too pre-

meditated. She often wondered why he had married her. Now she wondered why he had not married that other woman called Marjory, whose name she had heard fall from his lips with a tenderness that her own had never called forth. What was the "terrible dream" to which he had referred in those semi-conscious moments? She did not believe that the words had alluded to the accident. Hugh had probably not realised that an accident had occurred, and a man who had shown such calmness and presence of mind during those minutes when the horses were galloping wildly down the hill, carrying them to what must have been almost certain death, was not likely to be so vividly impressed by the danger they had just escaped. No, the "terrible dream" had more probably some other connection, and, even while he spoke the words, the galling thought had flashed into her mind that her husband, speaking as a man may speak in his sleep, was alluding to his marriage. That was the dream which was so terrible a one. He had married another woman, and not that Marjory whom he loved; in the confused recol-

lections which crowded on the brain with the return of the senses her husband had believed that he was lying in the arms of that other woman, and that he had dreamed of his marriage to herself.

And those people standing round them had heard and seen! How much did they know, she wondered, of which she was in ignorance?

Muriel was determined that both for her husband's sake and her own the world should not see that she was aware of the fact that she did not possess his affections. By degrees she would learn the truth, and there would be people who could tell her of the woman who held the first place in her husband's heart. Lady Peebles was a person to whom she could partially confide her trouble, and who for the sake of her family name would not talk about it, or tell the world that the Hevershams did not "get on." Muriel had always liked her, and from the first the old dowager had taken a strong fancy to the girl whom her nephew had married. Lady Peebles approved of Muriel, for she recognised in her some of those at-

tributes which she considered were indispensable to a *grande dame.* She looked upon the modern young married women whom she saw around her very much as a dignified housekeeper may look upon the kitchen-maids with whom she has occasionally to be brought in contact.

Lady Peebles, with all her prejudices, and some of them were very sensible ones, was not only a very kind woman, but she was also far more truly a woman of the world than those by whom she was regarded as an old frump. In her husband's lifetime she had been a recognised power in English society, for Lord Peebles had been in several cabinets, and his wife had known how to gather round her interesting and remarkable people, not of England only, but of all Europe. There remains yet, fortunately for England, a portion of its leading class in society which exercises a silent but powerful influence upon the classes below it. It is not noisy and self-assertive, and its doings are not always chronicled in weekly journals; it stands aloof from the feverish anxiety to make money by any means which present themselves in

order to spend it upon personal pleasures and luxury, and it keeps its name untarnished and its hands clean. It is sneered at by the more fashionable world; but the sneers are the product of an impotent jealousy on the part of the sneerers. It works silently and unostentatiously for the benefit of a great people, using its riches and its territorial influence to promote the happiness and the prosperity of the majority. It holds aloft the honour of England which the right of centuries has given into its keeping, and stands, a powerful protest, against the corruption of the most corrupt phase which English society has ever passed through; a pledge to the nations, which look on in amazement at an historical aristocracy soiling its fingers in the mud of dishonest and immoral speculation with a cynicism which would shame a Polish Jew, that the old traditions which made England great are not wholly forgotten and extinct. Lady Peebles belonged to this class, and though the smart world laughed at her and at those like her, it did so with a disagreeable consciousness that the influence which she and her kind exercised upon society was

a far more sound and enduring one than its followers could ever hope to wield.

All her life accustomed to observe the line people took in the world, she had watched her nephew's young wife carefully during her first season in London as Lady Heversham. She had seen with satisfaction the quiet and unassuming self-possession with which Muriel had taken up her new position, and it had immediately enlisted her sympathies with her new niece. She herself had all the simplicity of one who came of an ancient lineage, for it is only the aristocrat of modern make who is afraid of what may come "between the wind and his nobility;" and the vulgarity which she saw practised around her, even by those whose blood should have caused them to know better, strengthened her prejudices against modern customs and manners. She had noticed with satisfaction that Hugh's wife had not allowed herself to be drawn into that set in society which she so much disliked and whose contaminating example she so consistently deplored, and she had gone out of her way in consequence to be kind to Muriel and to make her

feel that in her she could count upon possessing a true relation and friend. Muriel was a young and very beautiful woman, and as Lady Peebles had no idea how her nephew had settled matters with his mistress at the time of his marriage, and would have been quite as incredulous as Mr. Fortescue had been had she known the truth, she always dreaded lest he might again fall under the influence of the woman with whom he had lived for so long, if indeed he had ever ceased to be under it. On the latter point Mr. Fortescue, to whom she had expressed her fears on the subject, had once reassured her. He would not tell her any details, nor had she asked him to do so, knowing that he never spoke of other people's affairs about which his advice had been asked or his help required. All that he would say was that he had reason to know that Hugh's former entanglement was completely at an end. Even he, however, could not say whether it might not at any time be renewed, and he agreed with Lady Peebles that it was of the utmost importance that Muriel should soon have a son, or, at anyrate, commence having children.

That evening, when Muriel returned to the drawing-room from her husband, Lady Peebles observed her attentively. She had heard her nephew's words when he regained consciousness after being stunned and had seen the effect which they had produced on his wife. She wondered what was in the latter's mind, and whether what she had heard would influence her in her behaviour or her conduct towards her husband. It was a complication which could not have been foreseen, and Lady Peebles did not know enough of her niece's character and temper to be quite sure how she would take the discovery which she must have made, neither did she know how far it might have been a revelation to her.

Nothing was to be learned from Muriel's manner or countenance. She occupied herself in making the necessary arrangements for those who were to depart the next morning, ascertaining the hour at which they wanted to breakfast, and ordering the necessary carriages to convey them and their luggage and servants to the station.

Adèla Wollaston watched her also.

"It is easy enough for her to carry it off now," she said to herself, "but if ever she begins to care about somebody else it will be another matter." And then she fell to wondering whether the somebody else could not be found. It ought not to be difficult; at least there would be plenty of men quite ready to fall in love with so beautiful a girl as Muriel, and then the consciousness that she was loved would make her husband's want of affection for her stand out in sharper contrast. Altogether, Mrs. Wollaston thought that a little skilful management might lay the foundation of a very interesting series of domestic complications in the Heversham *ménage*. She made herself unusually agreeable to her hostess until it was time to wish her good-night and good-bye, for it had been arranged that, as all the party were going to London, they should join the Scotch express to the South at Carnforth, which would arrive at Euston about six o'clock in the evening, thereby entailing a somewhat early breakfast and start from Heversham.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE than six weeks had elapsed since Whitsuntide, and the London season was fast drawing to a close. It had been an unusually gay one, and even the tradesmen were obliged to confess that there had been little to complain about, and that their customers had spent as much money as they could afford and probably considerably more. Mr. and Mrs. Heylands had been a great success, from the Wollaston point of view, though Mrs. Heylands had doubts upon the subject in her own mind. Mr. Heylands had no doubts at all. A glance through the counterfoils of his cheque-book would have been quite sufficient to remove them had he entertained any. The dowager duchess's house in Park Lane had been all that Mrs. Wollaston had represented it to be, and a large number of people, some of whom bore the best known names in society, had eaten and drank in it at Mr. Heylands' expense, and had gone away saying to each other

that George and Adela Wollaston certainly managed to do things very well.

One of the most beautifully arranged entertainments of the season had been the concert which Mrs. Heylands had given during the first week in July. She had ventured to remark to Adela Wollaston that though they gave on an average two dinner-parties a week, hardly anyone who dined with them had invited them to dinner in return. Mrs. Wollaston explained that this was not to be wondered at; that the dining-out world in London was a portion of its social life into which new-comers could only hope to penetrate by degrees.

Next season, she assured Mrs. Heylands, they would reap the fruits of their hospitality, for then people would begin to recognise the dinners as an institution, and those who accepted them would, of course, ask them again. The thing to do, she declared, was to give something which would be a little out of the common. Everyone was wearied of balls and dinner-parties, and there was no possibility of making either the one or the other differ in any very

remarkable degree from other entertainments of their kind. As Mrs. Heylands had no daughter there was no particular object in her giving a ball, and, as Adela remarked to her with a twinkle of amusement in her eyes, a ball would be no advantage to Mr. Heylands. He could not expect the leaders of the Conservative party to come and dance at it, though some of the younger members of the Primrose League might do so. The thing to do was to give a concert,—but such a concert as should make people anxious to be asked to it. Very few private concerts had been given that season, and these had not been of the first order of artistic excellence. If the Heylands would only have the de Reszkes, and Melba, and a few other singers of the first magnitude, Adela Wollaston promised that she would undertake to make it one of the smartest entertainments of the season.

The matter had not been at the first a very easy one to arrange. Mr. Heylands had already discovered that trying to be smart was a very expensive thing, and he was beginning to think it was time that he should see some return for his outlay. Adela Wollaston

felt nervous lest the goose that had laid such satisfactory eggs should not last out the season, and she determined that if it had to be killed prematurely it should at least produce the most valuable of its eggs in the death-struggle. To do her justice she really worked very hard to insure the success of the concert, so soon as Mr. Heylands' consent had been obtained that it should be given. She secured the greatest artists who could be procured to sing that night for the Heylands, and ten days before the date fixed for the concert it became known in the world that not only was the music going to be of the very best, but that the audience would include smart, not dowdy, royalty, together with the whole of Mrs. George Wollaston's select circle of friends and acquaintances. Adela Wollaston was besieged by letters and callers imploring her to use her good offices with her friend Mrs. Heylands to procure the petitioners an invitation.

"I might just as well keep a theatre agency," she said, laughing, to Mrs. Heylands. George Wollaston and she were dining in Park Lane a day or two before the concert was to take place. It was only a

friendly little dinner, and there was nobody else besides themselves. They frequently dined with the Heylands on what Adela called "free nights."

"A theatre agency?" asked Mrs. Heylands, mystified. "Why a theatre agency?"

"Because I believe I could sell your invitation cards at ten guineas each," Mrs. Wollaston replied. "You have no idea what a run there is upon your concert."

Mrs. Heylands looked much gratified. "Dear Mrs. Wollaston," she said, "I'm sure it will be entirely owing to you if it is a success. You work yourself to death over it."

"These sort of things are always a bother to get up," said Adela Wollaston, airily, "but I think you'll be pleased. What lucky people you are, to be sure! What you are spending on this concert would keep us for a year,—wouldn't it, George?" she added, turning to her husband.

The Heylands felt a little uncomfortable. They were at heart a good-natured, simple couple, not purse-proud or selfish. An ambition to mix with

fashionable people was perhaps their only failing, but it was an ambition which was an honest one. Had they known the true character of that phase of society which had such a fascination for them, or had they not been prevented by that strain of simple single-mindedness which is to be found in the middle classes of the north country—a relic, perhaps, of Puritan influence—from discerning the corrupt and turbid depths which underlay the glitter and refined luxury which they saw around them, they would have been the first to be shocked and disgusted at its cynicism and heartlessness.

John Heylands, in his simple confidence in that upper class of his country into which he and his wife were so anxious to enter, could not have conceived that any of its members would stoop to procure money for the pursuit of their pleasures by methods from which many adventurers sprung from the lowest dregs of society would have recoiled. The husband who increases his income by means of the infidelities of his wife is a product of recent growth in English society.

As it was, the Heylands commiserated the couple who were dining with them that evening. They had seen enough of the world to understand that it must be very uphill work for those whose income was a limited one to live in it, and they pitied people like the Wollastons, whose birth they believed obliged them to keep up certain appearances which their purse could not afford. Mrs. Heylands, in particular, sympathised deeply with Adela Wollaston. She was beginning to wonder whether it would not be possible to make them some substantial return for all the trouble which they had taken in introducing them into London society, and the thought of how it would be possible to do this delicately, and in such a way as not to offend her friends, troubled her much.

Adela had often confided to her the anxieties and difficulties of her life, and how hard it was sometimes to make two ends meet, and Mrs. Heylands thought of the thousands put away by her husband every year because his ends overlapped each other to such an extent that it was difficult sometimes to know how to dispose of them. She would not have felt so much

sympathy for Mrs. Wollaston could she have known that the latter had made, in one way and another, some very handsome commissions out of the orders which Mrs. Heylands had given by her advice to her, Adela Wollaston's, tradespeople. These commissions had not, certainly, been taken out in actual money, —there was at least that difference between the Wollastons and their cook,—but in its equivalent. Adela's account with her dressmaker had been considerably reduced since she had taken Mrs. Heylands to that lady and placed her under her guidance in matters of dress, and many other tradespeople had shown their gratitude to Mrs. Wollaston for securing to them Mrs. Heylands' patronage in a similarly delicate manner. Of course nothing, or very little, had been said on either side. The tokens of gratitude were, for the most part, silently offered, and as silently accepted.

The concert, which was to be the Heylands' crowning effort to establish their claim upon the attention of society, bade fair to be of considerable advantage both socially and pecuniarily to the Wol-

lastons. The entertainment was to be given upon the most lavish scale. Adela had impressed upon Mrs. Heylands that a thing of this sort, unless it were done very well, was better not attempted at all. A ball might fail for many reasons, she declared, but a concert could only fail because sufficient attention had not been paid to the details of it. So the details had been intrusted to Mrs. Wollaston to arrange, and she was practically given *carte blanchè* to order what and where she chose. It soon became rumoured that not only was the music to be excellent, but the supper to be provided for the guests at its conclusion was to be of the very best, while the flowers, it was said, were to be a sight to behold. The promised presence of a certain number of royalties, native and foreign, had made a great number of people anxious to be invited—an anxiety which was increased to a feverish pitch when it became known that the invitations were to be limited to three hundred. Mr. and Mrs. Heylands never received so many invitations to dinner as they did during the few days preceding the date fixed for their concert. People who had

dined with them suddenly remembered the fact of having done so, and hastened to atone for their forgetfulness by asking them to dine in return.

Mrs. Heylands had been anxious to ask some county neighbours who were in London and who, she thought, would be hurt at not being invited. The kindness of heart which prompted her to wish to include them among her guests was genuine enough, but there also lurked behind it a desire that representatives of the county should see with their own eyes the Heylands receiving royalty and the elect of the fashionable world under their roof. Adela Wollaston would not hear of these county neighbours being asked. "They won't know a soul in the rooms," she told Mrs. Heylands, "and they will stand huddled up together like your Westmoreland sheep when they see a strange dog. It would be no kindness to them, and it would spoil the point of the whole thing. Leave the selection of the people to be asked to me. All you need do is to stand at the top of your staircase and shake hands with them as they come up."

Mrs. Heylands submitted to her friend's superior judgment, and quieted her troubled mind by asking her neighbours to dine on an evening subsequent to that fixed for the concert,—an invitation which, however, was somewhat stiffly declined by them.

"I wonder why Lady Heversham and Miss Goring have refused," she said to Adela as they were talking over the coming entertainment that evening at dinner in Park Lane.

Mrs. Wollaston looked up from her plate quickly.

"What," she asked, "are they not coming?"

"No," replied Mrs. Heylands, "apparently not. Lady Heversham wrote me a note this morning saying she was very sorry, but that she was afraid she should be unable to come to the concert. She does not give any reason. I must say I am sorry, for people will think it rather odd that the Hevershams should not be here,—especially in Westmoreland. I think it is rather rude of her."

Adela Wollaston laughed a little disagreeably.

"I daresay she is jealous!" she answered. "Your concert will be a very much smarter affair than any-

thing she could give. No doubt she knows it, and won't come for that reason."

"I am sorry she won't come," said Mr. Heylands. "The Hevershams, I must say, have been most civil to us. Lady Heversham has asked us to everything she has given since we have been in London. I wonder what the reason of it is."

"I have told you the reason of it," said Mrs. Wollaston. "Muriel Heversham is jealous."

Adela was very well aware that jealousy had nothing to do with Muriel's refusal to attend the Heylands' concert. She instinctively guessed at the true cause of it. She felt that it was Lady Heversham's way of expressing disapproval of the manner in which her neighbours, the Heylands, had been *exploités* in London by her husband's cousin and his wife. It had been openly said that Mrs. George Wollaston was "running" these rich provincials, and Lord Heversham had heard it laughed about in more than one of his clubs. If the Wollastons were his relations, the Heylands were his neighbours in the country, and he did not wish them to suppose that he was in any

way responsible for his cousins' dealings with them. John Heylands was a man who might make himself unpleasant if he discovered that the Wollastons had simply been making use of him and his money to serve their own ends in society. Hugh had told his wife that he thought that Adela Wollaston was carrying the matter a little too far, and when the report of the magnificent scale upon which this concert was to be given reached their ears both he and Muriel at once decided that they would not be present at it. As Mr. Heylands had said, Lord and Lady Heversham had both been very civil to them in London, and, as a matter of fact, theirs had been among the few invitations which the Heylands had received in return for all the hospitality which they had lavished upon George Wollaston's friends and acquaintances. Muriel had made a point of asking them several times to dinner, and had not left them out of anything which she had given that season. Knowing Mr. Heylands' wish to meet political people whom he thought might be of use to him in attaining the great desire of his life, she had taken care to introduce

him to them whenever she had an opportunity of doing so. Mr. Heylands sometimes thought that people whom he met in the Hevershams' house were much more civil to him than those whom the Wollastons brought to his own house in Park Lane. The latter had a way of talking among themselves about things which he neither understood nor was interested in, and about people whom he did not know, and if he ventured to join in the conversation, they stared at him until he felt that he had in some way taken an unpardonable liberty. At the Hevershams, however, nobody treated him in this manner, whereas in Park Lane he often felt as though he were keeping a hotel gratis.

When he had consented that the concert should be given, he had done so, resolving in his own mind that this entertainment should be the last. He had done nothing but write cheques ever since he and his wife had come to London, and he had told George Wollaston very plainly that he did not as yet see that his expenditure had been productive of any remarkable results. The table in the entrance at

Park Lane was often, it was true, covered with visiting cards; but their owners seldom or never asked if Mrs. Heylands were at home, and the footman whose duty it was to answer the door-bell in the afternoon not unfrequently took the cards out of the letter-box, where they had been deposited by a passing servant.

Perhaps the thought that the season was so nearly over, and that the Heylands would in a short time return to their native haunts in Westmoreland and drift out of her life altogether, made Adela Wollaston a little reckless in her proceedings with regard to the final entertainment which was to be given in Park Lane. Mrs. Heylands had been aghast at the probable expenses of the concert and had told Adela that she did not know what her husband would say when he came to realise what the total cost of it had been. Even George Wollaston had expostulated with his wife, and had told her that he thought she was letting the Heylands in for too big a thing, and that there would be a row when the bills came in; but Adela would listen to no one. She intended that the

concert should be talked about, and that those who were present at it should remember that they owed their invitation to her. The great artists who were to sing, to be sure, could not be approached with a view to giving them an opportunity of showing their gratitude to the Wollastons who had been the means of their being engaged—they were too great for that. But there were other sources from which many solid advantages would flow in. The order for flowers alone was a very large one, and the order for the champagne, which was to be of the very best, amounted to a good deal of money, besides the cost per head of the supper itself.

Adela felt extremely annoyed with Lady Heversham for refusing to come to the concert. Personally, of course, she did not care whether Muriel were among the guests or not, but she felt at once that the Heylands would wonder why she had declined to come, and that afterwards her action might be taken up by them as a proof that the Hevershams had disapproved of her and her husband's dealings by them. Latterly, she reflected, Muriel Heversham

had been very rarely to the Heylands, and had declined several of their invitations. As she invited them to her house, however, this could not be because she did not want to keep on the old friendly terms with them; it could only be because Lady Heversham had discovered that the world looked upon the guests in Park Lane as those of the George Wollastons and not of the real host and hostess, and that she had not chosen that it should be thought that she was there because her husband and the George Wollastons were related to one another.

When the evening of the concert arrived, Mrs. Heylands' drawing-rooms were thronged with the smartest of the smart world. Nearly everybody who had been invited had come, and the royalties had arrived punctually at the hour at which they had been expected. Mrs. Heylands' bosom thrilled with an emotion which set the diamonds upon it a-sparkling as she descended the staircase to receive them, and, when they had been accommodated with seats in the concert-room, and she had resumed her place at the doors to welcome the ever-increasing stream of

guests, her face beamed with satisfaction as name after name was called out of those of whose doings she had long read in the newspapers but whom she had never thought to welcome as a hostess in her own house. Even Mr. Heylands forgot the cheques which would have to be written to pay for the evening's entertainment. One of the Government Whips had pressed his hand cordially as he passed him, and had said in a significant manner to him: "Ah, Heylands, another year and I suppose we shall see you in the House. You won't have much time for society then." Mr. Heylands was delighted, and Mrs. Wollaston, who happened to be standing by, rewarded the politician with one of her brightest smiles. She had, as a matter of fact, asked him to throw a word of encouragement to his host. "He's getting a bit crusty," she had said of Mr. Heylands to the Whip, who was a great ally of hers. "Do say something to put him in a good temper. You needn't commit yourself, you know,"—and so Mr. Heylands had gone about the rooms beaming, for he felt that the Whip's words could mean nothing less

than an invitation in the near future to contest some seat in the interest of the party. He was so elated that he forgot his usual shyness and became so talkative that he had to be hushed down by his wife and the Wollastons on more than one occasion during the music.

Poor John Heylands' satisfaction at the sight of his well-filled drawing-rooms, and at the knowledge that he was entertaining royalty under his own roof, was destined to receive a severe shock later on in the evening. The music was over, and most of the guests, including the royalties, had left. A certain number of people, however, remained, sitting at the little supper-tables where the constant relay of hot and cold dishes had never failed during the evening, or scattered about the drawing-rooms. At the end of the latter was a small conservatory, where, in the midst of palms and baskets of gorgeous sweet-scented orchids supplied by Mrs. Wollaston's particular florist, a fountain splashed, its falling waters illuminated by countless tiny globules of electric light, each one of which was scarcely larger than the glow-worm it resembled.

Mr. Heylands, wandering through the now fast emptying rooms, looked into the conservatory. Huge blocks of ice placed among the palms and the flowers made the temperature of the place refreshing after the hot drawing-rooms, and he sat down for a few moments in a corner where some armchairs had been arranged. He had hardly been sitting a minute or two when a couple passed close to him and sat down near the fountain a few feet distant from him. The lady glanced at him as she passed, but no look of recognition came into her eyes, and Mr. Heylands felt sure that he did not know her. Her companion he knew perfectly, for he was the Government Whip who had spoken such pleasant words of encouragement and promise to him earlier in the evening,—those very words which had caused him to feel that, after all, perhaps his wife had been right in urging him to spend his money upon society, and which had made him rather ashamed of the suspicions that sometimes entered into his mind regarding the straightforwardness of the Wollastons, and of his doubts as to whether their friendship for his wife

and himself was as disinterested a one as they wished it to appear.

The Whip had his back almost turned to where Mr. Heylands was sitting, and therefore had not noticed his presence in the conservatory, and he and his companion had hardly seated themselves before the sound of his own name fell upon Mr. Heylands' ears and attracted his attention. He listened just long enough to realise that one of the couple who were talking together was completely unaware of his vicinity, while the other had not the slightest idea of his identity. They were discussing him and his wife in low but perfectly audible tones, and Mr. Heylands learned for the first time how he was looked upon by those who were enjoying his hospitality.

"The Wollastons seem to get hold of people like these Heylands every year," the lady said. "I suppose it's all done by Mrs. George really," she added, with a sidelong glance at the man sitting beside her.

"Mrs. George can be very useful to the *nouveau riche* who wants to get into society," replied the politician guardedly. He did not choose to commit him-

self to any remark about Mrs. Wollaston which might be repeated to her and cause mischief. "Look at to-night's affair," he continued. "I don't believe there is another woman in London who could have filled these provincial bores' rooms as she has filled them this evening."

"What does she get out of old Heylands, do you suppose?" asked the lady a little abruptly.

"Oh, I imagine that in this instance it's a mere friendly thing. These Heylands are Westmoreland people, you know, and George Wollaston's mother was a Lester; in fact, I know they met first at Heversham. Very likely the Hevershams asked Mrs. George to help them along a bit in London."

"That I am sure they did not," answered the unknown lady. "Muriel Heversham told me that she was very sorry that these Heylands had allowed themselves to be entirely run by the Wollastons. Have you noticed that the Hevershams are not here to-night? Depend upon it Adela Wollaston is making a good thing of it. What's our host like? I don't know him by sight."

"Big man with reddish hair—red face, and sandy whiskers."

"Humph! not Adela's style, I should have thought, but it's astonishing how much money can add to people's personal attractions."

"Oh, I don't think there is anything of that sort in this business—I really do not think so," remarked the Government Whip with a nervous little laugh. "Heylands wants to get into Parliament, and George and Mrs. George are making him pay for his political ambition, that is all."

"There will be some pretty little bills for this concert; it will cost as much as contesting an election," replied his companion, slightly shrugging her shoulders. "Do you really think," she continued, laughing, "that Adela Wollaston provides our host with nothing more than dreams of gratified ambition in return for his lavish expenditure? I expect that Mr. Heylands' ambition is not the only passion which has to be gratified."

"I really think you are mistaken in this case. Of course that importation from South Africa whom

the Wollastons produced last year was a different matter. I'm afraid that Mrs. George was—well, a little bit indiscreet in her conduct, to say the least of it; but as George didn't mind, of course she could do as she liked. I'm pretty certain that old Heylands has got very little out of her for his money beyond vague promises and the sight of his house filled with people who think they have honoured him enough by eating and drinking at his expense, or in listening to the music he has paid for, as we have all been doing to-night."

"Mrs. George is a wonderful woman."

"She is a clever one," responded the Whip; "she knows exactly how far she can go."

"And how little she can give."

"Some rich men are more exacting than others. Our host of to-night, now, has no vice about him—just an honest provincial snob. Mrs. George probably took his measure in a moment. You've only got to look at the Heylands—Oh, Lord!" and the speaker broke off abruptly.

The sudden ejaculation was caused by the sight

of Mr. Heylands' figure as the latter rose hastily from his seat behind one of the palms and walked across the conservatory to the drawing-room beyond it.

His companion looked up startled at his exclamation.

"What is the matter?" she said. "Who was that man? I thought he had gone out of the conservatory as we came in."

"That? why—him!"

"What bad grammar for a politician! Pray explain."

"It was Heylands himself! He must have heard every word we said."

"Serve him right for listening! he ought to have got up and gone away sooner."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the Whip again.

He was genuinely perturbed. He had caught sight of a look on Mr. Heylands' face as he went out which was not a pleasant one to see.

The woman at his side was only amused.

"It strikes me," she said, laughing, "that the Wol-

lastons will have to put the shutters up as far as this business is concerned."

"I had just called him an honest provincial snob," groaned her friend.

"Well, it was better than if you had called him a dishonest one! Anyhow, he must have a very good idea of the real state of things by now. What should Heylands do? Sounds like a Hard Case in 'Vanity Fair,' doesn't it? I think perhaps we'd better say good-night to our hostess. Seems as though it wouldn't be all harmony in Park Lane this evening. However, it's all your fault; you knew the man by sight and I didn't. If he hadn't been a cad he'd have got up and shown himself directly he heard that we were talking about him."

The last remaining guests eventually said good-night to Mrs. Heylands, and John Heylands, standing near her, concealed his anger and contempt as best he could. His wife was radiant. Everybody had congratulated her on the success of the entertainment, making a mental note while they did so that they must remember to ask the Wollastons to dinner,

or invite them into the country in August. He did not choose to open her eyes that evening to the absurdity of their position in the London world. It was as much as he could do, when the last of the guests had departed and Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston remained for a few minutes to talk over the concert, to be civil to them, especially when his wife profusely thanked Adela Wollaston for all the trouble she had taken to insure its success. He bade them a civil good-night, however, though he made no pretence of joining in his wife's expressions of gratitude, and it was with a feeling of relief that he heard their carriage drive away from his door.

A sentence or two of the conversation which he had overheard in the conservatory had given him the clue to something which he had noticed more than once in Adela Wollaston's manner to him which had puzzled him. John Heylands was a very simple man, and he was also honestly attached to his wife. He had been brought up in the moral atmosphere of the north-country upper middle-class. His grandfather, indeed, had been a Quaker, and though, as their

riches and social position gradually increased, the Heylands had allowed their Quaker traditions to lapse, the present owner of Grey Scaur had inherited the old-fashioned principles of almost Puritan uprightness and moral rectitude which are engraved in the character of so many north-country families who have never suffered themselves to be contaminated by the modern spirit around them. On more than one occasion honest John Heylands had been made uneasy by a little something in Mrs. George Wollaston's manner to him, when chance threw them alone together,—which he could only describe to himself as giving the impression that she was, as he mentally expressed it, "setting her cap at him." His absolute devotion to his wife had prevented him from ever giving the matter a moment's serious thought, but he had sometimes wondered what Mrs. Wollaston meant, and whether, had he responded to what he could not help believing to be advances on her part, she would have entered upon a regular flirtation with him. What he had overheard that evening left no doubt in his mind that he had quite unwittingly

escaped a great danger, though he was far from realising how great it had been. He had read in his newspapers of unfortunate individuals who fell into the hands of blackmailers, but he certainly could not have conceived that such a profession had its representatives among smart ladies of society.

Had it not been for the couple who had discussed Mrs. Wollaston in his presence that evening, John Heylands would in all probability have never given a second thought to certain little remarks and glances which she had bestowed upon him when they had been alone together. He was not a stupid man, however, and possessed his fair share of that shrewd penetration common to his countrymen, and what he had overheard had, at least to a certain degree, opened his eyes, and had made him determined to find out whether he and his wife were in reality the poor dupes which the couple in the conservatory had considered them to be.

He kept his own counsel that night, and listened to his wife's delighted remarks on the success of their concert in sympathetic silence. It was only when she

recurred to the subject of making the Wollastons some return for all the trouble which they had taken for them that Mr. Heylands displayed what she took to be a strange want of gratitude towards friends who had done so much for them.

"To-morrow," he said drily, "I'll just tot up for you the amount which the cheques I have drawn in the last six weeks comes to. I expect you will be surprised. The music alone to-night cost not much short of a thousand, and God knows what George Wollaston's bill for the supper and the wine will come to."

"I know!" replied Mrs. Heylands. "That's just what makes me feel so uncomfortable. Here are we spending all this money, which would be a fortune to those poor Wollastons. Didn't you hear her say when they dined with us a night or two ago that this concert would cost what would keep them for a year? It must be very hard for people like them, who have to live in the world on nothing at all; and when I think how kind and unselfish they've been to us—"

"Now, Jane," interrupted her husband, decidedly,

"don't you trouble your head about people like the Wollastons. You may be very certain that they have been well repaid in some way or other for whatever trouble they have taken about us, or they wouldn't have taken it."

The following day Mr. Heylands went to Carlton House Terrace to luncheon with the Hevershams. He knew that Muriel was always at home at luncheon, and that Lord Heversham was generally also to be found there at that hour, and he had come to the conclusion that he would try and find out whether they had any knowledge of the way in which he and his wife's efforts to get into London society through the good offices of the George Wollastons was judged by the world. He was curious to know, also, why the Hevershams had not come to the concert, for he felt sure that they must have had some special reason for not having wished to do so, as Lady Heversham was going out a great deal and taking her sister with her everywhere. It was past two o'clock when he reached the Hevershams' house, and he was shown directly into the dining-room. The windows of this

room looked over the trees and the water in St. James' Park to the Foreign Office and the towers of Westminster, and it was pleasantly cool and quiet after the hot glare and noise of the streets. He found Muriel and her sister sitting at luncheon alone. Several extra places were laid, for Lady Heversham gave her particular friends a standing invitation to come in to luncheon, and it was very rarely indeed that two or three people did not appear at two o'clock.

Muriel was a little surprised when the servant announced Mr. Heylands. She had not expected to see him the very day after the concert, a long description of which she had noticed in the "Morning Post" that morning. She felt rather embarrassed as to how to account for her non-appearance at it, but nevertheless she received Mr. Heylands cordially. Her husband, she told him, was in the house and would probably join them in a few minutes.

"You seem to have given a most beautiful concert last night," she said, thinking it better to plunge at once into the subject and get her excuses over. "Violet and I were very sorry not to come to you,

but as a matter of fact we did not go anywhere last night, and I had already refused a dinner. There has been so much lately; we both feel worn out with our dissipations and are longing to get down to Heversham and lead a quiet life."

"I think you were right not to come, Lady Heversham," he said; "the singers you could hear at Covent Garden any night. It was a very tiresome affair, but Mrs. Wollaston and my wife seemed to be pleased with it."

Muriel looked at him curiously. "I am very glad that Mrs. Heylands was pleased," she said a little markedly. "That sort of thing must be very difficult to arrange well."

After a few minutes Lord Heversham came in, and no more was said about the concert. After luncheon was over he asked Mr. Heylands to come and have a cigar and some coffee in his sitting-room, while Muriel and her sister went upstairs to the drawing-room. John Heylands was very glad of the opportunity thus afforded him of having a little conversation with Lord Heversham, and the latter, seeing

that his visitor had evidently something on his mind which he wished to say, thought it not improbable that he wished to consult him about his chances of being asked to stand for some seat in Parliament, which he well knew was one of Mr. Heylands' favourite topics of conversation.

It would have been difficult for John Heylands to approach the subject upon which he was determined to enlighten himself had not Hugh given him a favourable opening by asking if he had made any progress in his political plans since he had been in London and had come across so many of the political people.

"I think," replied Mr. Heylands, slowly, when the servants had poured out the coffee and left the room, "that I was a fool to take a house in London and believe that I could get into London society by entertaining other people's friends."

Lord Heversham looked critically at the ash on his cigar.

"You've kept open house since you have been in

Park Lane, haven't you?" he asked, feeling that it was necessary to say something.

Mr. Heylands rose from his chair and stood with his back to the fireplace, stirring his coffee viciously. "Yes," he replied, "I have. Do you mind my asking you a question, Lord Heversham?"

"A hundred, if you like," answered Hugh, wondering what was coming next.

"Is it true that everybody laughs at us, and that people just come to our house because Mrs. Wollaston manages my wife's visiting list?"

"My dear fellow, I don't know what you mean! I never heard anybody laugh at you. Of course, you didn't know many people in London when you took your house in Park Lane, and you wanted to know the London world. Mrs. Wollaston knows everybody. You couldn't have had a better person to introduce you. I daresay that she has rather extravagant notions of how things ought to be done; she lives with a set which is rather reckless about the money it spends."

"And yet her husband is comparatively a very poor man!"

Lord Heversham blew a little ring of smoke into the air and watched it curling upwards towards the ceiling. "Yes," he replied; "but poverty and economy don't always go together."

"It's not the money I mind," said Mr. Heylands, —"if I have to do things at all, I like to do them well; what I do mind is hearing myself laughed at for a snob in my own house, by my own guests, and pitied for being an idiot."

"It doesn't much matter what people say of a man, unless he happens to be poor," said Lord Heversham. "The world always says ill-natured things—from jealousy, generally. I should not pay attention to anything I might overhear, if I were you."

"I should like to ask you one more question, but of course I must not forget that the Wollastons are relations of yours. I happened to overhear a conversation in my house last night in the course of which some very unpleasant things were said of them. That, however, is no affair of mine, and very likely jealousy, as you say, is at the bottom of a great deal of the unpleasant things one hears about one's neigh-

bours. All that I should be glad to know is, whether it is true that the Wollastons make a practice of introducing unknown people into society,—or rather of pretending to do so; that last year it was a Colonial millionaire, this year provincial snobs, like my wife and myself, and that next year it will be somebody else; that the only thing necessary to secure Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston's patronage is, in short, plenty of ready money. This is what I hear said, Lord Heversham, and, if it is not true, I think that somebody like yourself ought to warn your cousins what is being said of them and what a false position the people whom they befriend are placed in." John Heylands became a little excited as he spoke, and in his excitement the accent of his county came out in the tones of his voice. He would have said much more, but he remembered that he was talking to Lord Heversham of people who were his relatives, and whose acquaintance he had made in his house.

Hugh found himself within measurable distance of what he dreaded and disliked more than anything in the world; namely, a social unpleasantness. He

had always feared that the day would come when Mr. Heylands would discover his true position as regarded the Wollastons. He knew that John Heylands was by no means a snob, though his wife might be one, and he believed that he had accepted the Wollastons' offer of friendship and help in perfect good faith, thinking that through their assistance he would realise his dream of getting into Parliament. He contrasted him with the other rich men whom George and Adela Wollaston had taken up and felt that a great difference lay between them. Hugh was quite at a loss as to how to smoothe down the angry and disillusioned man beside him, for he felt that he was perfectly right to seek an explanation of what he had heard. He only wondered how much John Heylands really knew of Mrs. Wollaston and of what had been generally said of her relationship with some of the other rich men whom she and her husband had brought out in society.

"My dear Heylands," he said quietly, "you ask me some very awkward questions, and I think that I am hardly the person to answer them. However, I

will do my best. Remember that I know absolutely nothing of how you and Mrs. Heylands came to intrust yourselves to the Wollastons' guidance in social matters, but unluckily society is looked upon by a certain set in these days as a pure matter of business. So many people wish, for one reason or another, to buy their way into it that some of those who find themselves naturally in the midst of it are ready to take the price offered. They very naturally prefer to deal with the highest bidders. Between ourselves, I do not think that Mrs. George has always been very discreet in her choice of the people she has godmothered in society; but society knows very well how to distinguish between those who only wish to get into it from snobbish motives and those who, like yourself, have some definite object in view, to attain which a certain acquaintanceship with the world is necessary. Therefore, my dear fellow, if I might advise you, I should say: do not trouble your head about anything you may hear, for as far as you are concerned it cannot be of the slightest consequence."

Mr. Heylands listened in silence to Lord Heversham's remarks, and felt, as did Hugh himself, that they were very weak. He gathered from them that Lord Heversham could not tell him that it was untrue that the Wollastons made a kind of profession of launching people desirous of getting into society, and this was the point which made him more angry than any other. He did not, as he had said, so much object to the expenses to which he had been put, and he was not the least ashamed of wishing to know and be known by the great world of London. What he was ashamed of was the thought that he was being jeered at as a snob, who merely wanted to scrape acquaintance with smart people, and was willing to pay anyone who would bring them to his house.

His naturally red face grew crimson as he answered Lord Heversham, and his manner assumed a certain rough dignity for which the latter admired and respected him.

"I quite understand," he replied. "You have told me as much as I had any right to ask. I was

a fool to allow my wife to believe all that Mrs. Wollaston told her, but, you see, my father brought me up to believe that people who were ladies and gentlemen were also people of honour. I hope you will not think me impertinent to your relations the Wollastons if I say that neither Mrs. Heylands nor I have the slightest wish to be regarded in the light of people who pay them for their good offices in the world. Perhaps, if you have an opportunity, you will tell them this. I am sorry that Mrs. Wollaston should have made the mistake of thinking that we were of that class. I overheard one of my guests of last night calling me a provincial snob, but he also did me the honour of calling me an honest one. Pardon me for saying that I think, perhaps, that I am a little too honest for Mrs. George Wollaston and her husband." So saying, John Heylands held out his hand and wished his host good-bye.

Lord Heversham hesitated a moment, not knowing how to reply, and then he shook him warmly by the hand.

"You're quite right, Heylands," he said. "I may

tell you that my wife and I were both sorry when we saw that you were allowing Mrs. Wollaston to manage your house for you, but it was no affair of ours, and it would have been very impertinent of us to give you our opinion when it wasn't asked for. But for goodness' sake don't have any row over the business. Just make it clear to the Wollastons that you can do without them, and start again next year on your own account if you think it's worth while. Anyhow, don't quarrel with Adela Wollaston; she can do you bad turns in places where you may want good ones. Come upstairs and see my wife before you go."

The two men went up to the drawing-room and Mr. Heylands said good-bye to Muriel.

"Please ask Mrs. Heylands to forgive us for not coming to you last night," said the latter, as she shook hands with him.

"I am very glad you did not come, Lady Heversham," answered John Heylands, simply; "we shall both always believe that we know your reason for not having done so, and be grateful for it. You and

Lord Heversham have shown yourselves to be real friends to my wife and myself."

Muriel Heversham turned to her husband in surprise as he left the room.

"What on earth does he mean?" she asked.

"He means," replied Lord Heversham, "that he has found out the Wollastons' little game and is about as disgusted as he can be. He's a good sort, is Heylands."

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN HEYLANDS took Lord Heversham's advice. A few days after the concert he quietly announced his intention of returning immediately to Westmoreland. What passed between him and his wife the Wollastons never knew. George Wollaston, however, felt that he had been justified in his fears that the Heylands were being worked a little too hard, for he received a dry letter from Mr. Heylands in which the latter informed him that he was about to leave London.

No explanations of this sudden step were offered, and neither in this letter, nor in one of a similar purport which Mrs. Heylands wrote to Adela Wollaston, was there any further word of thanks for the supposed assistance which the Wollastons had rendered to them during the few weeks of their tenancy of the house in Park Lane.

Mrs. Wollaston took the matter very philosophically. She wrote a cordial little note to Mrs. Heylands, in which she expressed the pleasure it had been to her and to her husband to be of any use to her and Mr. Heylands. Indeed the note was so friendly that Mrs. Heylands when she read it hesitated whether she should show it to her husband, as she feared lest the latter might think that, notwithstanding his express stipulation that she should not do so, she had renewed her thanks to Mrs. Wollaston in her letter announcing their departure for Grey Scaur.

Adela concluded her note with many regrets that she should not be able to come and see her friends before they left as she herself was going out of town for a few days.

It was no part of her policy to have any unpleasantness when it could be avoided. It was sufficiently clear to her that the goose had become aware of the process of killing, but she consoled herself with the thought that the supply of eggs had already given signs of an imminent exhaustion, and that the last one which had been laid had been of considerable value, both social and pecuniary. She was, nevertheless, a little disappointed, and in her own mind she held Muriel Heversham as responsible for her disappointment. From little remarks which Mrs. Heylands had let fall, remarks which Adela had at once perceived to be of a tentative nature and hazarded with a view to finding out whether she and her husband would be offended at receiving some more substantial proof of the Heylands' gratitude than mere expressions of thanks, she had quite expected that at the close of the season some useful present would be made to her. After the Heylands' abrupt departure from London, there had not been wanting people who had told Mrs. Wollaston that Lady Heversham had said everywhere that her husband's cousins,

the Wollastons, had got hold of them and were ruining them. It was not true, for Muriel had never said anything of the kind, and neither she nor her husband, whatever they had thought upon the matter, had ever said a word about it excepting to each other. Adela's informants, however, knew that she disliked Lady Heversham, and were quite ready to make her believe that in all probability she had been at the bottom of the sudden revolt on the part of Mr. Heylands.

Adela would have been able to forgive other wrongs which might be done to her far more easily than a wrong which she imagined had entailed the loss of money. She immediately settled in her own mind that the Hevershams had interfered between her and the Heylands, and that, had it not been for the things which Muriel had said, which had no doubt been repeated to them, they would have parted very good friends with her at the end of the season and have probably urged her acceptance of a handsome present in money, or at least in jewellery, as a return for her efforts on their behalf in the London world.

Adela Wollaston had not the slightest intention of quarrelling with either Muriel or her husband. She felt that the better the terms upon which she was with the Hevershams, the easier it would be to some day revenge herself upon Muriel for the latter's fancied interference. How to commence her attack upon her she did not know, for there was something in the manner both of Lady Heversham and of her sister towards her whenever they met which, though perfectly friendly, was never at all intimate, and she saw extremely little of Hugh. Adela Wollaston made use, under these circumstances, of the only weapon which seemed to lay to her hand for the moment. She never lost an opportunity of deploring the evident want of sympathy and affection which existed between the Hevershams. The world had wellnigh forgotten the fact of Hugh having lived for many years with a mistress before his marriage, but somehow or other the story cropped up again, and some people said that the mistress had cropped up again also. Nobody had ever been able to couple Muriel Heversham's name with that of any man going about in

society; and Adela was too well aware that any attempt on her part to start a story about her must result in failure. She was careful to be very good-natured in all she said about Muriel, and merely pitied her when speaking of her to her friends as a woman who had been married because her husband had to find a wife, and who had hitherto failed to produce the children for whose sake alone she had been married. To pity a person is often a sure way of injuring him in the eyes of the world, and, where abuse will fall harmless, pity will often wound.

The stories that were going about concerning her husband's indifference to her did not reach Muriel's ears. She had no intimate women friends to come and make mischief under the guise of friendship. Her sister Violet was perhaps more intimate with her than anybody, but whatever Miss Goring may have suspected or heard regarding the relations between her brother-in-law and his wife she kept to herself. Muriel had never made the slightest allusion to her husband's want of affection for her, and yet Violet Goring had often wondered whether she did not in reality feel

hurt and wounded by it; for to her, living in the same house with them, it was very evident that, whatever terms they might be on with each other, love did not enter into the bond, at anyrate not in Lord Heversham's case. The world very soon began to look upon the Hevershams as an ill-assorted couple without quite knowing why it did so. The little hints and remarks which Adela Wollaston scattered like seed in half a hundred drawing-rooms quickly sprang up and bore fruit. There were plenty of women who were quite ready to say an ill-natured word of Muriel Heversham simply because she had won a much coveted prize in the matrimonial market, and these were ever anxious to prophesy that the Heversham marriage would end disastrously.

Since the carriage accident at Heversham, Muriel had convinced herself that she was not the woman who held the first place in her husband's heart. She often wished that she were not too proud to ask about her husband's life before he married her of someone who could enlighten her in her ignorance regarding it, but she could not bring herself to do what she

considered to be an ungenerous action. Lady Peebles, she thought, could have told her much, and Muriel felt that if she ever had to confide her doubts and suspicions to anybody she would sooner do so to her than to another, for she both liked and trusted the old lady, and felt sure that, as the latter had told her, she would always prove a good friend. She did not know that Lady Peebles was watching the development of events in her nephew's married life with the gravest concern, nor could she guess that the stories which were being sedulously circulated regarding the want of sympathy existing between her husband and herself had reached that lady's ears in many and varied forms.

The words which had escaped her husband's lips when he regained his consciousness after being hurled from the box of the break on the afternoon of the excursion up Kentdale had partially explained to Muriel many things in his manner towards her which had before perplexed and troubled her. The thought which distressed her most, however, was that the revelation was a partial one. Hugh's indifference, his

frequent fits of absence of mind and weariness of life in general, which could not entirely be concealed by his courteousness and invariable good temper, were all to be accounted for if some person other than his wife held the principal place in his thoughts and affections.

From the first it seemed as though Hugh had shrunk from allowing his wife to penetrate into his inner life; and when Muriel heard a person described as being difficult to know she often wondered whether there was anybody who could be more so than her own husband. He it was who had suggested that Violet Goring should practically make her home with them until she married. Fond as Muriel was of her sister she often thought that the constant presence of a third person might be an impediment in the way of attaining to a more genuine intimacy with her husband; but she had soon realised that to be *tête-à-tête* with his wife was the last thing which Hugh desired, and that Violet's presence acted as a kind of buffer between them. Indeed they were hardly ever alone, and if by any chance they were so, Hugh would speak

but little and often appeared to be immersed in his own thoughts. The business connected with his different properties seemed to absorb him, and many of those who had been more or less intimate with him in former days when he had been Hugh Lester found him yet more reserved since he had become Lord Heversham and had married, and infinitely more silent. Reserved he had always been, but it was a reservation as regarded his own personal feelings and opinions only. On any topics other than those which touched the æsthetic side of his nature he had been a ready and sometimes a brilliant talker, but the friends of Hugh Lester found an altered man in Lord Heversham. At first they were inclined to attribute this alteration to the cares and responsibilities which attend upon the possession of great estates, but a far more probable explanation of it was afforded by the stories which began to be repeated concerning the unhappiness of his marriage and the reports that Lord and Lady Heversham did not "get on."

Hugh had certainly never realised how completely the woman with whom he had lived had formed part

of his life until he lost her. During the years they had been together he had unconsciously been more in love with the harmony and contentment which Marjory Hungerford had brought into his life than with herself. The luxury of feeling free to throw off his natural reserve, knowing that in Marjory he would invariably find a quick sympathy with and a ready understanding of those refinements of taste and perception which he had always shrunk from allowing the world to suspect he possessed in so large a degree, had been a far greater one than he knew.

The more reserved a man is by nature, the greater is his longing for one kindred spirit to whom he can lay bare his own, and sooner or later in life he finds it.

That the kindred spirit when found is almost invariably a temporary resident in the flesh of some fellow-being, and that human nature rarely considers itself to be in complete accord with the one without also possessing the other, is merely one of the numerous little ironies of life.

The spirit and the flesh are supposed to be antagonistic to each other, yet how often the latter is the

portal through which alone access to the former is obtainable! In Hugh's case both the spirit and the flesh had rebelled against the loss of Marjory Hungerford and the forced substitution of another in her place.

Although Muriel was by no means equal intellectually to Mrs. Hungerford she was far from being stupid, while in physical beauty she greatly outshone her. In her character and in her ideas there were, indeed, many points of resemblance between the two, and Hugh had been struck by them on many occasions. These accidental points in common, however, far from creating any sympathy or pleasure in him, had had the opposite effect. Likenesses, moral or physical, to a person we love displayed by some other individual are more often painful and irritating to our feelings than pleasant. The recollections and associations which they arouse are generally sacred things, and we feel a sort of resentment towards the person whose individuality has been able to arouse them, and look upon him or her as an unwelcome trespasser into the private domain of thought or memory.

When, therefore, by some word or action, his wife

reminded him of Marjory Hungerford, Hugh would feel a sensation as of sharp mental pain, and immediately the odious process of comparison would commence in his thoughts to the detriment of poor unconscious Muriel.

The very feeling that his wife was capable of sympathy with his nature, and would probably understand his ideas and views of life if he allowed himself to communicate them to her, made him shrink the more from doing so. It would have seemed to him as though he were sharing with another what he had hitherto entrusted to Marjory Hungerford alone. The longer the time which separated him from her the keener grew the longing to be with her again. Between himself and Muriel he had raised up a mental barrier, and if no physical one existed it was merely because he considered that until a son should be born to them the object of his marriage with her was still unattained. As the months passed, and there were no signs of his hopes being realised, his mortification increased, and with it the feeling that after all he might just as well have married Marjory Hungerford and have let the

world say what it would, for in the end it seemed as if the Heversham title and lands would equally go to the distant branch of the family the idea of whose inheritance his brother had so much disliked.

During the London season which was now about to close, Muriel had been fully occupied in taking her sister into the world, and the husband and wife had really seen but little of each other. In a few days' time they would be going down to Heversham, where they were to have a succession of visitors all through the autumn.

Another woman, with her youth and beauty, would speedily have consoled herself for the indifference of her husband, and the world began to look with impatience for the rising of the curtain on the second act of the Hevershams' domestic comedy. Everybody said that a lover must soon make his appearance upon the scene,—it was impossible that it should be otherwise. Mrs. Wollaston was never tired of pitying that poor Muriel Heversham, and her sympathy was so well feigned that very few people suspected the jealousy and dislike which prompted it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE little town of Riva, which stands in Austrian territory at the head of the Lake of Garda, has little to recommend it save the natural beauty of its position. Its hotels are few in number and not particularly good, and travellers coming southward through the Brenner Pass to Verona leave the main line and entrust themselves to the rough steam tramway which jolts and rattles over the mountains between Riva, with the object of going on board the little steamer which takes them the whole length of one of the most beautiful and least known of the Italian lakes, and deposits them eventually at the Junction of Desenzano on the line between Venice and Milan.

It was the middle of September, and Mr. and Mrs. George Wollaston were returning from a visit to San Stefan, the domain of the head of a great banking-house, which was situated on the borders of Hungary. Baron Schmidt, their host, was a Jew, and a man of

enormous wealth. Like others of his race, having entirely failed to effect an entrance into the society of his own country, he had come to England, where he had found that a judicious use of his money had speedily opened to him the doors of the British aristocracy, though the houses of the Viennese and Buda-Pesth leaders of society had ever been rigidly closed to him. In his extensive territory of San Stefan, which he had purchased with some of his spare millions, he preserved on an immense scale. Its forests teemed with red deer and roe, bear and wild boar, while its vast agricultural plains held almost unlimited numbers of hares and Hungarian partridges. Baron Schmidt was no sportsman himself, but the shooting at San Stefan was managed by men who were, and those who know the Austrians and Hungarians at home know that some of the best and hardiest sportsmen the world produces are to be found among them.

At San Stefan everything both in and out of doors was conducted upon a system of the greater luxury. The Baron was quite aware that his English visitors would expect the very best of everything from a Jew

who was also a millionaire. As a matter of fact the visitors to San Stefan were almost entirely English, but they were the English whose family names ranked in their own country with the haughty Austrian houses with their sixteen quarterings, and with the Magyar magnates who would as soon have accepted an invitation to stay with their bootmaker as with Baron Schmidt. To be sure the owner of San Stefan always took care that among the large parties he entertained for the shooting in the autumn there should be a sprinkling of guests of other nations bearing high-sounding titles and names. He knew his English fairly well, and had followed with amusement the career of many a *soi-disant* foreign noble of both sexes in the English world. The average Englishman knows about as much of Continental society as he does of that of ancient Egypt. He accepts every foreigner's title and account of himself with a charming simplicity, and when at length he discovers that he has been entertaining an adventurer unawares the fact merely strengthens his belief that gentlemen only exist in England. The Baron was perfectly aware that it would not have been

possible to invite his Austrian and French or Italian friends to meet his blue-blooded guests had the latter not happened to be English. Society of other nations has a habit of knowing more or less who is who in all countries, and those who are in the world know their English peerage, and other volumes of the kind, far better than the Almanach de Gotha is known by English hostesses. As it was, the baron's English friends were quite happy under the impression that they had met foreigners of good society beneath his roof, and were surprised, when they returned to London and happened to talk about them to some members of their respective embassies, to be met with a polite stare and hear that Princess "this" or Count "that" was unknown even by name to the representatives of their country at the Court of St. James.

For several years Baron Schmidt had been in the habit of entertaining a party of his English acquaintances at San Stefan in September. Some of them went because they enjoyed the shooting with which he provided them; others, because they were in his dept and did not think it wise to decline his invita-

tion; and others, again, because they had got money out of him on former occasions which they had duly repaid in currency of another description and were always ready to repeat the transaction when opportunity offered itself. Of these latter was Mrs. George Wollaston.

Adela and her husband had completed their visit to San Stefan, whither they had gone after spending the month of August at Homburg. Instead of returning direct to England they had decided to make a little *détour* and visit the Italian lakes, and it was in pursuance of this plan that they found themselves stranded at Riva. Their train had been very late, and when at length they arrived at the little frontier town it was to find that the steamer to Desenzano had already left, and that there was nothing to be done but to spend the remainder of the afternoon and sleep the night at Riva.

The unexpected arrival of an English couple, accompanied by a valet and a maid, and a considerable quantity of luggage, created quite a commotion in the hotel. It was the amount of luggage which

particularly astonished the landlord. The majority of his visitors brought with them a canvas-covered valise of very modest dimensions, containing that single change of raiment which the Teuton reserves for cases of extreme necessity when he travels or takes a holiday. The sight of Mrs. Wollaston's large basket boxes containing the various toilettes which she had required at Homburg and San Stefan, and of George Wollaston's portmanteaux and paraphernalia of gun-cases, shirt-boxes, and dressing-bag, caused the inhabitants of Riva to come to the conclusion that Royalty had descended in their midst, and even the custom-house officers were overawed. There is not much to do at Riva beyond to sit and watch the lake and the little boys fishing in it, and George and Adela Wollaston were not sorry when it was time for dinner. The summer dining-room of the hotel is on a broad quay jutting out into the water, with a pergola of vines above the rows of little tables. From the leaves of the vines divers entomological specimens drop at intervals into the repast, while unwieldy fish swim lazily round in the water below waiting for

bread and pieces of meat to be thrown to them. The Wollastons took their seats at one of the numerous little tables and proceeded to order their dinner, while the waiter placed before them a dish of cold ham, cut in slices, and surrounded by huge pieces of crimson watermelon and ripe purple and white figs, to be eaten together as a *hors d'œuvre* pending the arrival of the soup.

Adela Wollaston was not in a good temper. The visit to San Stefan had not been a success. Baron Schmidt had been under considerable obligations to her in the days of his first appearance upon the scene in London some few years previously, and he had not been ungrateful. She had put him in communication with various impecunious personages to his and their mutual satisfaction and her own advantage, and antisemitism not being among the prejudices of English society, the Baron, who had begun life as a pawnbroker and money-lender in Prague and had bought his baronial title in Italy early in the seventies, speedily obtained that *entrée* into the great world in England which he was well aware would

never be accorded to him in other countries, and least of all in his own. Baron Schmidt, however, probably considered that he had liquidated his obligations to Mrs. Wollaston, for he had not responded to her laments as to her poverty, as he had done in past times.

The Wollastons amused themselves while waiting for their dinner to be served by watching the other diners around them. The company seated beneath the trellised vines was a very cosmopolitan one. Austrian and German commercial travellers formed a considerable portion of it, with their napkins tucked tightly round their collars and the blades of their knives thrust far down their mouths, in a manner which suggested the most painful possibilities should a passing waiter unwittingly jog their elbows.

So far as they could see, the Wollastons were the only English people present, and they had begun dinner some time when a tall, graceful woman dressed in black, wearing a black lace mantilla over her auburn hair instead of a hat, came quietly through the little crowd and sat down at a vacant table close

beside them. She carried a book in her hand and appeared to take little notice of the people round her, for after giving her orders in Italian to the waiter, who hurried up to her table as soon as he had perceived her, she opened the volume and began to read. A single glance at her was sufficient to tell the Wollastons that the new-comer was a lady, though they could not be sure of her nationality. Her features and colouring were those of an Englishwoman, but the tones of her voice and the fluent Italian in which she spoke, as well as the mantilla which she wore over her head, caused them to think that she must be of Italy.

Adela Wollaston, whose eyes were good, saw that she was reading an English book, and said so in a rapid undertone to her husband, who was beginning to talk about her under the impression that she would not understand him if she should overhear his remarks.

The sound of their voices as they talked together over their meal seemed to attract their neighbour's notice, for she looked towards their table with rather

more attention than she bestowed upon the others, and once or twice Adela, looking up from her plate, caught the glance of a pair of dark violet-coloured eyes resting somewhat critically upon her, to be immediately withdrawn as they met her own.

Mrs. Wollaston could not help looking at her and wondering who she was. The woman was decidedly handsome, she thought, and underneath the black lace mantilla, which was fastened with two or three small diamond brooches, she could see masses of dark auburn hair which clustered over a broad white forehead. Her eyes, Adela noticed, were large and rather unusually far apart, and she fancied that they wore an expression which was a thoughtful and at the same time an infinitely weary one. There was that about her which reminded Adela of someone she knew. The turn of the head and something indefinable about her whole presence seemed to recall somebody to Adela's memory, and she tried in vain to think who it could be.

She determined to tell her maid to find out who this lady was, for it annoyed her that she could not

remember who it was to whom she imagined she saw a resemblance. Evidently the waiters considered her to be a person worthy of attention, for the head-waiter was most assiduous in his endeavours that she should be served quickly. Her dinner was not of long duration, and after one or two dishes and some fruit had been brought to her, she rose from her table and sat down at the extremity of the pergola, where a waiter brought her some coffee, and Adela Wollaston saw her light a cigarette as she drank it.

"English?" asked George Wollaston of his wife as soon as their neighbour was out of hearing.

"I don't think so,—Italian, probably, who understands and reads English."

"Not dark enough."

"Venetian, perhaps," said Mrs. Wollaston. "I believe some of the Venetian women have auburn and red hair,—Tiziano's women, don't you know. Does she remind you of anybody?" she continued.

"No—not that I know of."

"She reminds me of somebody and I can't think who it can be. I wonder who she is!"

"Let's ask the waiter," suggested George Wollaston, and he tapped a glass with his knife to attract his attention.

The waiter could not give them very much information, possibly because he could talk no English or French, and they could speak very little German and no Italian, which was the man's native tongue. They gathered, however, that the lady who had aroused their curiosity was an Englishwoman, that she had been only a few days in the hotel, and that she was supposed to be on her way to Venice, where she lived. This was not very interesting information, and Adela determined to ask the landlord of the hotel his visitor's name. He could speak French and there was more chance of making herself understood with him.

After dinner was over she saw him standing outside the door of his hotel, and immediately asked him if he could tell her the name of the lady in black who had dined at the table next to her and her husband that evening.

The landlord bore out his waiter's assertion that

she was English. Her name, he told Mrs. Wollaston, he could not pronounce, but she had put down her address as Venice and her nationality as English in the register of the hotel. If Madame wished she could see the book and read the name for herself,—he kept it in the bureau, for every day it was examined by the commissary of police. Riva being close to the Italian frontier the Austrian police were very particular.

He produced the register of names from his office and pointed to an entry made some days previously.

Adela saw the name Marjory White written in clear, rather large characters. Her nationality was put down as English and her place of residence Venice.

The name conveyed nothing to her, and, thanking the landlord, she rejoined her husband who was smoking a cigar by the lake-side.

That evening when Adela was going to bed she asked her maid if there was any other lady's-maid in the hotel, thinking that perhaps Mrs. White might have one; but the woman told her that the lady in question had an Italian maid who did not speak a

word of English. Mrs. Wollaston had dismissed the matter from her mind after this. They were to leave Riva by the first steamer the following morning, and it was not likely, she thought, that she should again see Mrs. White.

As her maid was dressing her in the morning, she recurred to the subject of Mrs. White, and what she had to tell Mrs. Wollaston surprised the latter considerably.

"Did you not say, ma'am, that the name of the English lady staying in the hotel was Mrs. White?" she said to Adela as she was brushing the latter's hair.

"I believe it is," replied Mrs. Wollaston; "but why do you ask?"

"Well, ma'am, such a curious thing happened this morning. Me and James was standing in front of the hotel after our breakfast, and James was just going to Mr. Wollaston's room when the lady came towards us. I suppose she had been out for a walk and was returning to the hotel, and she did not seem to notice us until she got quite close to us."

"There is nothing very curious in that," remarked Mrs. Wollaston.

"No, ma'am; but suddenly I saw James give a start and take off his hat, and the lady looked at him, and then she started too, and went so white I thought she was going off in a faint."

Adela Wollaston became interested in her maid's story. "Did the lady speak to James?" she inquired.

"Yes, ma'am, but just for a minute she seemed dazed, and as if she couldn't get her words out. Then she seemed to recover herself a bit and asked James how he was, and who he was travelling with. After that she went quickly into the hotel."

"How did she know him?" asked Mrs. Wollaston. "Had he been in her service?"

"Why, no, ma'am, that's just the curious part of it. Of course I asked him who the lady was and how he knew her, and he said as how she was a Mrs. Hungerford, and that he had known her because she was a great friend of Lord Heversham. She used to live in a villa at Highgate, James said, and many's the time he had been sent there with notes and things

when he lived with his lordship; but why the lady was so taken to when she saw him is more than I can say, ma'am."

"But the lady's name is White—Marjory White," said Adela, who felt completely mystified. "I saw it written in the hotel-book," she added—"Marjory White, and she lives in Venice."

Even as she spoke Adela Wollaston suddenly recollected that Marjory had been the name which had fallen from Lord Heversham's lips on the day of the carriage accident. Could it be, she wondered, that she had stumbled upon the woman who had been Hugh's mistress for so many years, in this out of the way Austrian village?

Her maid's next words strengthened her suspicions.

"She may call herself Mrs. White now, ma'am, but she was Mrs. Hungerford when James knew her. Lord Heversham was down at her villa most days when he lived in London and was Mr. Lester, James says," the woman added significantly.

Adela did not reply. She was thinking how she could best utilise the opportunity of making acquaint-

ance with this Mrs. Hungerford which chance had so unexpectedly thrown in her way. That this was the same woman with whom Hugh Heversham had had so long a *liaison* she did not doubt for a moment; but what was she doing here in this remote place, and why was she passing under another name?

It was certainly a pity that in an hour or two they would be leaving Riva. She would like to have stayed, for then she could have made friends with Mrs. Hungerford and perhaps discovered what she so much longed to know; namely, whether this *liaison* was a thing of the past, irrevocably over and done with, or whether there was not some means of bringing the whole thing on again to Muriel Heversham's detriment. That Marjory Hungerford, if this were really the woman's name, still maintained her influence over Hugh she felt convinced, but, unless she could in some way make friends with the former, she could have no means of knowing whether Marjory still cared about him, or why the two had allowed the accident of his marriage to interrupt their friendship.

"Did this Mrs. Hungerford, or Mrs. White—whichever of the two she may be—say anything more to James?" Mrs. Wollaston asked her maid presently.

"No, ma'am; she just went straight into the hotel—but she looked quite upset."

"James did not say that he was with a relative of Lord Heversham's, I suppose?" Adela continued carelessly.

"No, ma'am, he only mentioned that he was travelling with Mr. Wollaston. The lady didn't seem hardly to understand what he did say, or to listen to him; she was all of a tremble as soon as ever she saw him."

"That will do, Wickham," said Mrs. Wollaston; "I do not want anything more. You had better go and see that everything is ready, for the steamer leaves at eleven o'clock—and, Wickham," she added, as the woman was about to leave the room, "you had better warn James not to talk any more to this lady. We know nothing about her, and one cannot be too careful not to get mixed up with people one meets in these places."

Adela remembered that her husband's valet had formerly been with Hugh Lester. He had afterwards taken another place, and had been with George Wollaston about two years.

There was no doubt that, during the years he was in Hugh's service, the man would have had many opportunities of seeing Mrs. Hungerford, and it was probable that he was perfectly well aware of the relations which had then existed between her and his employer. He might prove a very useful person later on, but Adela did not at all want Mrs. Hungerford to know that she and her husband were relatives of the Hevershams, and she thought that the sooner he was out of the way the better.

After she had finished dressing she knocked at her husband's door and found him on the point of leaving his room.

"I want to speak to you," she said to him. "Such an odd thing has happened! You remember the handsome woman who sat near us last night? Well, who do you think she turns out to be?"

"How can I tell?" answered George Wollaston.

"She is a lady, evidently, but the name White conveys nothing to me unless—she's not Cecil White, the novelist, is she?" he added.

"No, her name is Marjory, and it's not White at all. She is a Mrs. Hungerford, and I believe she's the woman who kept Heversham from marrying for so long. Your valet knows her quite well, and she recognised him."

George Wollaston gave a little whistle. "That's an odd thing!" he exclaimed. "To think of our running across her in this God-forsaken little place! I often wondered what had become of the woman Hugh lived with before he married, and whether they kept the game up between them all the same."

"So did I," said Adela, drily. "Now I have found out what has become of her, and I mean to find out more."

George Wollaston looked at his watch. "You have only two hours to do it in," he said. "The boat starts at eleven. Besides, what is the use of mixing yourself up in the business? It's no affair of ours. Hugh's wife is better looking than that woman."

Adela interrupted him with a sudden exclamation. "At last I've got it!" she exclaimed.

"Got what," asked her husband, "D. T.?"

"No, the likeness which puzzled me to somebody I know. You put it into my head. Of course! she has a look of Muriel Heversham. I knew she was like somebody, and it's been worrying me ever since I saw her because I could not think who. Don't you see what I mean?"

"Can't say I do," replied George Wollaston. "She's a handsome woman, but not a patch upon Muriel; besides she's getting on,—considerably past thirty, I should say. I don't see the least resemblance to Muriel in her."

"I do," maintained Adela; "not in her features, perhaps, but there is something about her which reminds me of Muriel."

"Perhaps there is something about Muriel which reminds Hugh of Mrs. Hungerford."

Mrs. Wollaston shook her head. "No," she said, "I don't think that's likely. Heversham don't care a pin for Muriel and does care for the woman we all

heard him name as Marjory when he wasn't conscious of what he said. If James is right and this is Mrs. Hungerford, she is also the Marjory he is always thinking of."

"*Après?*"

"*Après* I am going to talk to her and find out how the land lies. We are not obliged to go by this morning's steamer. The one we were to have caught yesterday afternoon will get us to Milan this evening. We can go by that and send the servants and the luggage in front of us by this."

"I can't imagine why you are so anxious to make this Mrs. Hungerford's acquaintance," said her husband.

Adela looked at him quickly. She was not going to tell him her real reason for wishing to know Hugh's former mistress. She thought that he rather liked Muriel Heversham and would not approve of anything being done to injure her.

"It is for Muriel's sake," she replied. "I am afraid she is not very happy, and I have often wondered if this woman is not at the bottom of it. If

one could find out whether there is still something between her and Heversham one might be able to help Muriel some day if things came to a crisis. If there is nothing between them one could reassure her."

George Wollaston shrugged his shoulders. He knew by experience that it was useless to argue with his wife, and that she generally proved to be right. It was a matter which concerned the women, he thought, and therefore he had better not interfere. So the servants were told to leave by the morning steamer and take the luggage with them, and that Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston would follow them by the afternoon boat.

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(*Continued on page* 3 *of cover.*)

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THE JUST AND THE UNJUST. By RICHARD BAGOT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

BY

RICHARD BAGOT

AUTHOR OF "A ROMAN MYSTERY," "CASTING OF NETS,"
ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

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THE JUST AND THE UNJUST.

CHAPTER I.

NEARLY two years had elapsed since the day when Marjory Hungerford had parted from her lover and left him free to marry.

Resolute in her determination that there should be no half measures, and conscious that the very force and depth of her love for him contained in itself a probable source of weakness, she had caused her severance from Hugh to be as complete as if she had been actually dead.

She had left Europe almost immediately after her departure from the villa at Highgate. Travelling rapidly to Venice, she had re-engaged the gondolier

who had been in her service while she lived there, and a middle-aged woman who had acted as her maid, and with these two faithful servants, upon whom she knew she could thoroughly rely, and who were devoted to her, she had taken her passage for Constantinople on board one of the Austrian Lloyd steamers. She had spent many months travelling about in Turkey and in Asia Minor, bearing her loneliness and her sorrow as best she might. Her chief, and, indeed, only source of consolation, was derived from the thought that she had sacrificed her own happiness for the welfare of the man she loved. Her love she could not sacrifice, for it was always with her.

For a long time she had not even known with certainty whether Hugh had married or not. English newspapers did not often penetrate to the places she visited after leaving Constantinople, and if by any chance she saw one, she had shrunk from looking into it lest she should see some mention of him.

It was not until nearly a year had passed since

she had left England that Marjory found herself once more in places where London papers lay upon the tables in the reading-rooms of the hotels, and she had been able to overcome her nervous dislike to reading them. In some of them she had seen allusions to the Earl and Countess of Heversham, and from these alone she knew that Hugh had married. She told herself that she ought to feel glad that he had done so, but when she read that the Earl and Countess of Heversham had arrived in Carlton House Terrace for the season she could not feel as she wished to feel, and she spent a sleepless night in consequence, wrestling with the memories of her love.

She often wondered whom he had married, and then she thought that after all it did not greatly matter, provided that his wife was good to him and made him happy. Sometimes she would sit and picture Hugh's wife to herself. If she could only have been sure that he was happy, and that the woman who had married him had not done so merely for the sake of his position and his money,

she herself would have been happier—but who was to tell her this?

Marjory's fondness for her literary work had come to her rescue and saved her from despair a second time in her life. But it was long before she could concentrate her mind and her thoughts upon her writing, and for more than two years the novel-reading public looked in vain for the announcement of a new book by Cecil White. The love and reverence for the beautiful creations of God in the world around her, however, never failed to bring to her a sense of peace and consolation deeper than any which she could find within the stone walls of the churches.

After passing another twelve months in wandering about the East, Marjory returned to Venice, and resumed her literary work. The freshness and the charm of her writing which had won for her the sympathies of her readers had not deserted her, but there was a note of sadness in it now that had not been perceptible before. She wondered, as she read over her later compositions, whether she also was

becoming a pessimist, and a sad little smile would come over her face—a reflection of the weariness which was beginning to have its effect upon her thoughts and temperament.

She felt that she had drawn a blank in the lottery of Life, and whereas her nature, even in her troublous days, and in the lonely ones she had passed through before she met Hugh, had always impelled her to look upon the sunny side of existence, now the shadows seemed to creep steadily onwards, swallowing up the sunlight and changing it into gloom. She struggled against their encroachment, and the strongest weapon she had in her power with which to confront and drive them back was her great love for the man who had been her lover, and the conviction that by doing as she had done his true happiness in life had probably been secured.

At times, despondency, and a sense of great and utter loneliness, would wellnigh overwhelm her, and then she would turn to her love as one lost in a desert may turn to the star by the position of which

he shapes his course. There could be no sacrifice, she would tell herself, without pain, and the thought that she had sacrificed herself for her lover was one which never failed to soothe her pain though it could not remove it.

For some months after her departure from England, Marjory had wondered whether Hugh would make any effort to follow her and seek to persuade her to return to him. She hardly knew whether she hoped that he would do so or whether she dreaded lest her hope should be realised. She dreaded it, because she felt that she might not be strong enough to withstand his entreaties a second time, and that would mean that he must never marry —because she could never consent to wrong another woman and be his mistress if he had a wife, neither would she allow him to marry her and have the mortification of seeing her ignored by a society which would soon learn her antecedents. She hoped it, because—ah, well, she knew so painfully why she hoped it; and she crushed and trampled upon her hope, and beat it down as some evil thing that

sought to make her cowardly and selfish, and untrue to her love.

As time went on and she heard nothing from Hugh, and after she had seen by the newspapers that there was a Lady Heversham, she had understood. He had respected her wish to be left alone, and she trusted that he had recognised the wisdom and the justice of the step which she had taken and obliged him to take. She could not drive away the thought that would return with the quick sharp pain as of a stab, that, had he chosen to insist, she must have yielded and married him, and that, had his love for her been as her own, he would not have listened so readily to her arguments. At such times she would comfort herself by remembering that she had laid great stress upon the fact that if he married her he would place her in an odious position —that the world neither knew nor cared who or what Mrs. Hungerford might be, but would insist upon knowing all about his wife. If he had given way and not adhered to his idea of marrying her, she told herself with some little insistence that it

was because he had seen the force of her argument and would not expose her to the sneers and slights which would be cast upon her should she become Lady Heversham.

Once assured that Hugh had married, she determined to settle down once more at Venice. She was fond of the place, and the perfect repose and quiet of it made it a suitable spot for working at her books. On returning to Europe Marjory had determined that she would drop the name of Hungerford and be known by her *nom de plume,* with the only difference that she retained her own Christian name instead of adopting that of Cecil. She decided upon this course because she was now quite indifferent whether people identified her with the well-known author Cecil White or not. The retention of her own name of Marjory would serve to hide her identity from the curious when she was travelling and staying in hotels. Moreover, should Hugh ever hear that a Mrs. White was staying in some place in which he and his wife might find themselves, he would never imagine that it was she,

for he knew how jealously she had always concealed the fact of Marjory Hungerford and Cecil White being one and the same person.

Since she had learned of Hugh's marriage she only prayed that she might never meet him, until, as she had told him in her farewell note, they could both meet as old friends. She was a very long way from being able to think of him in this light, for years alone could bring about such a change of feeling.

Friendship may expand into love, but it is not often that love shrinks and dwindles into friendship. Marjory had been spending the summer months in the Austrian Tyrol, as she preferred leaving Venice at that season for places where she could wander about among mountain or woodland scenery. She was returning into Italy and had broken her journey at Riva, being anxious to see some of the country round the Lake of Garda, which was little known to her. Fate had willed it that she should there find herself under the same roof with the George Wollastons. She had never heard their name, for the

doings of London society had never interested her enough to induce her to read the journals which chronicled them, and even had it been known to her she certainly would not have connected it in any way as belonging to relations of Hugh's.

She had not seen the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston that evening, nor had she been a witness to the excitement which their servants and their luggage created. It was not until she had taken her seat at the little table which she had occupied at each meal since she had been at Riva that the sound of the English tongue attracted her attention and she had looked at the couple who were seated at the table near her. Accustomed to observe her fellow-creatures, especially when she was travelling, Marjory noticed at once that they were different from the usual tourists. Woman-like, her eyes turned at once to Mrs. Wollaston's well-cut clothes and her beautifully dressed hair, and she knew that people could not turn themselves out like that when on a journey unless they had a maid with them. She looked approvingly, also, at George Wollaston's neat dark blue

serge suit, and contrasted it favourably with the knickerbockers and variegated stockings worn by the men of a noisy tourist party at the other end of the little restaurant.

The sudden meeting with Hugh's old servant had been a terrible shock to her. For an instant she believed that Hugh himself must be in the place—having perhaps gained some clue to her whereabouts. The sight of the man, too, whom she had so often seen and spoken to when Hugh used to send him with notes or messages to Highgate, had brought back everything so vividly before her that for the moment she felt incapable of collected thought or speech. It was only after a moment or two had elapsed, during which time she became conscious that the valet and his companion were looking at her curiously, that she had been able to regain her presence of mind sufficiently to say a few kindly words to the man, and then she had forced herself to ask him how he came to be at Riva, dreading to hear that Lord and Lady Heversham had arrived at the hotel. When he had answered that he was no

longer with Lord Heversham she had hardly listened to his subsequent explanation that he was travelling with Mr. Wollaston. She had then, of course, concluded that he was with the couple whom she had seen shortly before at dinner. But the following morning, when she appeared at the twelve o'clock breakfast, the same couple were seated at the table they had occupied the evening before, and from her window she had seen the valet and the lady's maid and a large quantity of luggage going off by the eleven o'clock steamer, while a gentleman and two ladies who happened to be standing by them she supposed must be their employers. It had been an immense relief to her to feel that they had all gone, and she no longer connected the well-dressed couple near her with them, but concluded that they, like herself, were staying at Riva for a day or two in order to explore the country round it.

Marjory could not fail to see that she was an object of curiosity to her neighbours, and wondered why she should be so. She thought it very likely, however, that they had seen her name in the hotel

book and were exercised in their minds as to whether she were the authoress or not. She found, on taking her seat at the little table in the restaurant that morning, that it was considerably nearer to the Wollaston's than had been the case the evening before. As a matter of fact it was the latter's table which had been moved closer to hers, for Adela Wollaston had declared that the glare of the sun on the waters of the lake dazzled her eyes, and had told the waiter to move the table nearer to the next one a few moments before Marjory had come in.

She waited until the first course of the breakfast was over, and then said to her with a charming smile: "What a picturesque little place this is! I suppose that you, like ourselves, are on your way into Italy?"

Marjory replied that she was. She did not particularly want to talk to her neighbours, but, without being uncivil she could hardly avoid doing so, for it was evident that the lady near her was bent upon drawing her into conversation. After all, she thought, they would certainly be leaving by the

afternoon steamer and she would not be likely to see them again.

"Yes," she replied, "I am on my way to Venice."

"I know!" rejoined Adela Wollaston, with the engaging frankness she could so well assume when she was anxious to create a good impression. "I saw your name in the book, and noticed that you had put Venice as your place of residence. It must be a most fascinating place to live in! so—so quiet, I should think."

The ghost of a smile hovered round Marjory's lips. "Yes, it is very quiet," she answered—thinking to herself that Mrs. Wollaston did not look like a person for whom tranquillity had any special fascination.

"But you come to England, of course, do you not?" pursued Mrs. Wollaston, after a little pause.

"Occasionally. I do not know England very well; I have lived a great deal out of it."

Adela shot a keen glance at her. "That is a lie," she thought.

"We are on our way there now," she said, "by

easy stages. Neither my husband nor I have ever seen the Italian lakes, and so, as we have been paying a visit in Austria, we thought we would return by this rather roundabout route."

"The Italian lakes are well worth seeing," remarked Marjory, feeling that she must say something.

"Yes; I think this lake is very beautiful, and I suppose that Maggiore and Como are still more so. When we get back to England we shall have an opportunity of comparing them with the English lakes, for we are going to stay at a place near them."

George Wollaston looked up from a rather tough veal cutlet.

"Are we?" he began. "I didn't know,"—and then he was silent, for his wife gave him a warning kick under the table.

"Have you ever seen the English lakes?" she continued to Marjory, ignoring her husband's interruption.

"No, I have never been to the north of England."

"Ah," answered Adela, and she spoke very slowly and deliberately, as though she were weighing her words, while, as she uttered them, she looked Marjory steadily in the face—"they are very pretty too, in their way. We are going to stay with some friends who have a place not far from Windermere,—Heversham, it is called."

Marjory could not repress a sudden start at the speaker's last words, and the blood rushed violently to her face for a moment, after which she became very pale. George Wollaston looked at her and saw a piteous expression come into her eyes, and then he looked at his wife. The latter was leaning forward watching Marjory intently. She reminded him of a cat watching the struggles of a bird which it had maimed.

"By God," he thought to himself, "what cruel brutes women can be!" and he pushed his chair back from the table and got up.

"This place is infernally hot and the food is abominable," he said to his wife. "I am going to sit outside in the shade;" and, bowing to Marjory, he went out of the restaurant.

Adela Wollaston made no effort to detain him. She wished nothing better than to be left alone with her victim.

"I suppose that you know the Heversham?" she continued to Marjory, never removing her gaze from her, and giving her to understand by these words that she had noticed her agitation.

By a violent effort over herself Marjory regained her composure.

"I have met Lord Heversham," she said very coldly, "but I do not know his wife."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Adela. "To think of your knowing Heversham! I wonder where you met him. But how comes it that you do not know her? Ah—I forgot—he has not been married so very long, and you say you are very seldom in England."

"Lord Heversham was not married when I met him," said Marjory in a low voice.

"Ah, you knew him in his happy days, then. I'm afraid he wishes himself a bachelor again very often, poor fellow."

Marjory poured herself out a little red wine from the slender flask on the table beside her, but her hand trembled so violently that she spilled some of it on the table-cloth.

"Is he—not happy?"

Adela laughed. "My dear Mrs.—White," she said, dwelling somewhat lengthily upon the name, "it is very evident that you live away from your English friends! Lord Heversham happy? Why, he is miserable! He has married a girl whom he does not care for, and who does not care for him. She married him to be Lady Heversham—and he—well, he had to marry, as no doubt you know."

"Does she—his wife—behave badly to him?"

Mrs. Wollaston shrugged her shoulders. "It is not a united *ménage,*" she replied. "There are stories

about her, but I hope that there is no truth in them. Lady Heversham is a very beautiful woman and of course people talk. I imagine that it is more that they are utterly unsuited to each other. Of course, he wanted to marry and have an heir; he is the last of his branch of the Lester family, you know, and she, as I say, wished to be Lady Heversham. Both desires were very natural, but not quite enough as reasons for marrying. Besides, the heir has never appeared, so I suppose Heversham thinks his wife hasn't played fair, and that has complicated matters between them still more."

"And he is—miserable!"

Marjory repeated the words to herself, unconscious that she was speaking them aloud. An intolerable pain was gnawing at her heart. Her sacrifice of her own love and happiness had been useless—nay, worse than useless. By leaving the man she loved she had made this loveless marriage possible, and, by listening to her own foolish scruples, had brought this misery upon him whose happiness she had fondly thought to be advancing. A great despair rose up in her heart,

and then a sudden wave of fierce anger against the woman who had dishonoured the place which she herself had held in all but name for so many years, surged up within her breast, overwhelming for the time being every other feeling.

And Adela Wollaston sat watching her always. She could see that every word she had spoken had told—that every dart she had launched had hit its mark and had stuck quivering in the heart of the woman before her. If any doubt had remained to her that this was Hugh's former mistress the sight of Marjory's agitation would have dispelled it. Her husband's servant, she thought, had not been mistaken, and chance had delivered the woman, whom she had often wished she could meet, into her hand.

Adela had often heard it said vaguely that the woman who had kept Hugh Lester from marrying was a lady and no mere adventuress of the *demi-monde*. She had always supposed that she had been some married woman and that this was the reason why Hugh had never made her his wife. She could

see for herself now that rumour had been correct and that she was dealing with a woman of her own class. What Adela Wollaston could not understand was why Marjory Hungerford (for she felt convinced that this was her real name) should have allowed Lord Heversham to escape from her influence, and she could not see why the latter's marriage should have caused the two to separate from each other.

That Mrs. Hungerford knew nothing whatever of Hugh's present life was evident. For the moment Adela had thought that she was pretending ignorance concerning him and Muriel in order to conceal the fact that she had anything more than a mere acquaintanceship with Lord Heversham. Marjory's evident distress and agitation, however, which had increased at every word which fell from Adela's lips, had speedily convinced the latter that here was no pretence, and that what Marjory had heard had deeply surprised and grieved her.

"I am afraid that it is an unsatisfactory affair," she continued, as Marjory did not speak again, but

remained gazing straight in front of her, her face pale and drawn. "I should never be surprised to hear of a break-up in that establishment," she added. "The only wonder is that it has not happened already."

Marjory did not appear to hear her, for she did not reply. Presently she looked at Mrs. Wollaston. "Do you know them very well?" she asked.

"Very well—no," replied Adela. "I am only telling you what all the world knows about them."

There was another pause and Marjory rose from her chair. "I think," she said, with a little inclination of her head to her neighbour, "that I shall go upstairs. Your husband is right—it is really too hot here."

She turned away slowly and hesitatingly, and then, angry with herself that she should have betrayed so much emotion before a stranger, added:—

"Your story has really upset me. I am extremely sorry to hear that Lord Heversham and his

wife are not happy, for I used to know him in years gone by."

Her words fell haltingly from her lips, as if each one were an effort to pronounce, and Adela thought they sounded as if she were repeating a lesson. She seemed as though she were trying to make up her mind to say something more, for she stopped, abruptly, and hesitated again.

At last she decided to ask what for months she had been longing to know. The anger in her heart against the unknown woman who had abused and lightly cast aside what she had prized so highly gave her courage to put her question.

"Who was Lady Heversham," she asked, in a cold, dull voice, "before she married?"

"Oh," replied Adela Wollaston, "a girl nobody knew anything about. Lord Heversham picked her up on the Riviera, I believe, where her mother had a villa—Mentone, I think it was."

"You do not know her name?"

"Her name? Oh, yes—she was a Miss Goring."

Marjory Hungerford gave a sharp exclamation. "A Miss Goring?" she stammered.

"Yes—quite a lady, and all that sort of thing—and, as I said, very handsome. Muriel Goring, her name was, and she was the daughter of a Colonel Maitland, who married a rich widow and took her name also—but, Good Heavens!—what is the matter? are you ill?" added Mrs. Wollaston, for Marjory had staggered back and just saved herself from falling by sinking into a chair. For an instant Adela thought that she had fainted. "It is nothing," she gasped—"the heat—it has made me ill. Thank-you, I want nothing—I must go to my room."

Adela Wollaston looked at her in surprise, and offered to assist her, but Marjory made a gesture of refusal.

Mrs. Wollaston rose also, and followed her in silence out of the room. Then she joined her husband whom she saw sitting on a seat under the trees by the lake-side.

"She is certainly the woman whom Hugh lived with," she said as she sat down beside him; but she made no allusion to the scene which had just occurred.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Marjory regained her own rooms she felt as one stunned by a sudden and unexpected blow, and for some time she sat motionless and incapable of any consecutive thought. It seemed to her as though her senses were benumbed by some nameless terror born of a horrible dream.

What she had just heard from the lips of Adela Wollaston filled her with unutterable, unthinkable horror and dismay.

This sudden meeting with people who were evidently well acquainted with Hugh, and the tidings she had received from them of the unhappiness of his married life, had been a terrible shock to her, and one which had shattered and destroyed all her hopes that, by removing herself from his life, she had contributed to his welfare.

There is no other such bitterness as the consciousness that a great sacrifice has been made in vain, and Marjory felt that she had suddenly been brought face to face with the fact that the source from which alone she had been enabled to gain consolation and courage had been closed to her for ever. Her lover was the worse, and not the better, for what she had done, and her action had resulted in the ruin of his happiness as well as of her own.

Fool that she had been—she thought to herself angrily and bitterly as she listened to Mrs. Wollaston's words,—not to have known that he would never be happy with another woman. He had warned her that he would only be married because he was Lord Heversham and a rich man, and she in her folly had not believed him, and had preferred to trust to some woman marrying him for love, and to his being able in time to return her love. And, lest she should wrong this imaginary wife and make unhappiness for Hugh, she had left him—and this other woman, under the shelter of

his name, was trifling with all that she, who had only been his mistress, had held most sacred. The bitterness of the thought caused her mind to rise in revolt against the sordid prostitution which was recognised as "holy" matrimony because false promises had been spoken before some priest who had read an empty formula over the perjurers and called it a sacrament!

She had made no promises, and no spoken formula had made her union with her lover "holy." She had simply lived with him and been faithful to him in thought and deed: neither had she been paid for doing the same by settlements and other advantages as she would have been had the Church sanctioned their union.

Her indignation and anger against Hugh's wife had increased at every word which Adela Wollaston had said concerning Muriel, and at every innuendo which she had made as to her objects for marrying her husband, as well as to her conduct to him after marriage.

She would have no pity on this woman, she

thought. There should be no more scruples about wronging an innocent girl and robbing her of her husband's affections, since it was the woman who had sold her body to be called Countess of Heversham, and to have a right to spend the money of the man who had bought it, who was the despicable one, and not she, Marjory, who had gone to him because she loved him for himself.

She would return to him. He had implored her to allow the old relations between them to continue when he was married, telling her that, in his eyes, she would always be his real wife in all but in name, and she had refused—refused because she would not wrong his wife whom she believed must love him because she herself loved him so much. She had tried to put herself in that wife's place, and she could do so very easily, because she knew what she should have felt had another woman come between herself, who had not the right to bear his name, and Hugh.

But now she would refuse no longer. If he still wanted her—and how should he not?—she would

go back to him. His wife would have no cause to complain if he found elsewhere the happiness which she had denied to him—she would doubtless take her own where she could get it.

Marjory was left dazed and bewildered, unable even to feebly grope her way in the darkness of the great horror which had fallen upon her. Her own past life seemed to rise up again and smite her in the face a shameful, burning blow.

As she had mounted the staircase of the hotel and reached her room two words only seemed to ring in her ears, and beat into her brain with dull relentless insistency.

"Muriel Goring—"

Hugh's wife was Muriel Goring, that woman had said—she told herself again and again—but Muriel Goring was her own half-sister—her father's daughter! How could that woman be so silly! Muriel Goring? Why, that was the little child whom she had been so sorry to leave when she married and went to India—the one being in her home whom she cared for and who had cared for

her! She had been such a pretty little thing—and Hugh had married her? Oh, no,—that was absurd—*impossible!* it must be some other Muriel Goring.

And then she remembered how Adela had told her that this Muriel Goring was a daughter of a Colonel Maitland and a rich widow whose name he had taken when he married her. That was her father. And Hugh had met her on the Riviera—at Mentone? She remembered that, after her father's death, in a letter she had received from his lawyer, the latter had mentioned that he had died in his wife's—her stepmother's—villa at Mentone. Then, as the cruel truth forced its way into her understanding, Marjory sank down upon her knees.

"Oh God," she moaned; "what can I do? show me what I ought to do! Muriel—his wife—and a *bad* wife to him? it cannot be—God could never have allowed such a thing to be. Married to little Muriel, and I—" She shrank shuddering away from the thought which roused all the shame of her womanhood in her. Very slowly the power

of connected thought came back to her, and as it did so the horror of the thing and her own powerlessness to remedy it became more and more apparent to her.

Could it be true, she wondered, that Muriel had changed so much, and that the woman was so different from that which the child had been? Muriel had been so gentle, so loving—the one bright bit in Marjory's unhappy home. What had struck her to the heart when her father had disowned her, and forbidden her his house after she had left her husband in India, had been the thought that she should never see her little Muriel again, and that the child would be brought up to think of her as one to be ashamed of, whose name could never be mentioned any more.

She could scarcely believe that Muriel could have grown up into a shallow, heartless woman. If she had done so it was the fault of Mrs. Goring, and not her own. Perhaps Muriel's mother had forced her to marry Lord Heversham? Marjory thought that her father's second wife was capable of any action which

she might believe would secure a thing she desired. She remembered too well how her stepmother had left her no peace until she had accepted the man who had ruined her life by his infidelity and cruelty, simply because she was jealous of her and was determined to get her out of her father's house. Mrs. Goring must have known what sort of man he was to whom her husband's daughter was sacrificed. After her marriage, when it had been too late, Marjory had learned many things from her husband when he was in some of his drunken furies, hardly conscious of what he said. One of them had been the part which her stepmother had played in encouraging her husband to propose to her, and she could never forget that she owed all the unhappiness of her life to the woman whose jealousy had driven her from her home.

She felt convinced that Muriel had been forced to marry against her inclinations, and that this wretched state of things between her and Hugh was the natural consequence of such a marriage. And then came the thought that caused Marjory to cry

aloud for guidance, turning to that God whom she trusted and knew in her own way, though it was not the way of the priests and the churches.

A terrible temptation came over her. How would it be to end it all, once for ever? If she were dead nobody could ever know that Muriel and she were daughters of the same father, and that Hugh had married the half-sister of his mistress. She would be out of their way and it would be so easy. A boat upset on the lake, a slip over a mountain precipice on one of her many lonely walks,—her body might never be found, and if it were, who should identify her for the person she really was? She had made her sacrifice and it had failed. Surely, there was nothing more left for her to do in the world but suffer; and now she knew that her suffering was of no use to him for whom she had suffered so gladly.

Marjory was not one of those who, with a curious ignorance of human nature, entirely overlook the moral courage of the human being who voluntarily takes the initial step into the unknown, and who

brand suicide as a cowardly act. She knew suicide to be, in fact, no cowardice, but the courage of despair, when executed by a sane individual. Though the moralist does not like to admit it, not a day passes that some excellent Christian does not remove himself from the world in the full possession of his senses, and fully conscious of his own responsibility in so doing.

Marjory did not put the idea away from her. She took it up, so to speak, and reasoned with it, doubtful of nothing save that she possessed the necessary strength of mind and will to put it into execution should reason point to it as a solution of her difficulties.

Reason, however, pointed out that it would be no solution at all to Hugh's difficulties even if it should be one to her own. Then she dismissed the idea from her mind. To kill herself in order to escape from her own evils while there might yet be something for her to do for the man she loved—that would be cowardice, and would stultify all that she had done for him before.

If Adela Wollaston, instead of telling her that Hugh was unhappy with his wife, had said the reverse, reason would probably have pointed the other way. Marjory was perfectly clear as to this. But, living, what could she do? How could she approach Muriel, knowing what she knew—how approach Hugh?

She had been fearful of wronging his unknown wife and now she felt that insensibly and unconsciously she had committed a fearful wrong on one who was of her own flesh and blood. If she had not been cowardly, and had not shrunk from the pain of knowing who was to be her lover's wife, a hint of the truth sent by her to Hugh would have stopped this marriage which seemed to her to be so terribly unnatural. She would have saved her little Muriel from marrying a man for whom she had evidently never cared, and very likely Hugh's choice would eventually have fallen upon someone who would have made him happy and so everything would have been well for him. She must atone for her cowardice, she told herself. Some way there must be of making

Muriel see that her only true happiness lay in winning her husband's love—but, who would show her the way? God might, or he might not. She was not very sure that she had any right to expect him to do so—indeed the priests would tell her that all that had happened was a punishment for her own wrong-doing in the past.

The anger and resentment which she had felt against her lover's wife had died away when she had realised who that wife was. Marjory felt now that she had the happiness of two people to strive for. This in itself was sufficient to show her the folly of attempting to destroy herself. So far God had answered her sooner than she had expected when she prayed, but as yet she could not realise that He had done so. That, however, is often God's way of dealing with a human difficulty.

No sooner had Marjory convinced herself that there yet remained something for her to do in the world than she became possessed of a feverish desire to do that something quickly. She could formulate no plan of action, and she turned over idea after

idea in her mind only to dismiss them as impracticable. She could not think of one living person to whom she could appeal for help and guidance as how best to work, in order that a better understanding might be established between Hugh and his wife. She dared not approach Hugh himself, for she mistrusted her own strength, knowing how passionately she still loved him. There was not a soul in the wide world, she thought, to whom she could tell the secret of her past life without risk of injuring Muriel, for it would be a horrible thing if it should become known that Lady Heversham was the stepsister of her husband's former mistress. The world would not hesitate to affirm that she was his mistress still. One thing she resolved that she would do. She would go to England immediately. It might be that when there she would hit upon some means of attaining the object which she had in view. Anything was better than remaining idly at Venice while things were drifting from bad to worse. If no other way presented itself, she would go herself to Muriel and tell her who she was. It would not be difficult to

act so as to make Muriel believe that she, Marjory, had heard of her unhappiness and had come to her to reason with her, and save her from the perilous position in which she was in. Muriel would listen to her and believe her, for, alas, she would know that her stepsister spoke from her own bitter experience of the dangers to which a young wife was exposed who did not love her husband and thought herself unloved by him. Muriel need not know that she was even acquainted with Hugh, and she would easily be able to avoid meeting him. She was so sure if Muriel could only be induced to do her utmost to make her husband happy, in time he would learn to love her in return, not as he had once loved, perhaps, but sufficiently to insure tranquillity and happiness in his home. Yes, she thought, she would do this, if she could find no better way.

She was glad to think that the lady who had talked to her at breakfast that morning had left the hotel, for she did not wish to see her again. If she ever took anybody into her confidence in the matter

it must be someone whom she could trust, and whom she knew to be a good friend to Hugh and his wife. She had not liked Mrs. Wollaston, though she could not tell why.

To make quite certain that the latter was no longer in the hotel, Marjory rang for her maid, and bade her find out whether the English gentleman and his wife had left by the afternoon steamer. She was assured that they had; the maid had seen them go on board the boat.

Afterwards, when she went downstairs, Marjory looked in the hotel book, where she saw the names of Mr. and Mrs. George Wollaston. As inquiry of the landlord satisfied her that this was the same couple whom she had sat next in the restaurant she made a note of their names in the little note-book which she always carried with her.

The next day she travelled direct to London.

CHAPTER III.

THE George Wollastons did not linger long in the north of Italy after leaving Riva. Neither of them were great lovers of scenery, and certainly not to the extent of considering it worth while to pay hotel bills for the privilege of looking at it. A very few days after their departure from the little Austrian town found them in Paris, where Adela wished to stay for a night or two for the purpose of shopping.

The unexpected meeting with Marjory Hungerford had been a source of great satisfaction to her, but she nevertheless felt herself to be completely puzzled. She had told her maid to try and find out as much as she could from her husband's servant about Mrs. Hungerford, but she had not acquired much fresh information from this quarter. The valet had his own opinions about the lady whom

his late employer had visited so often, but he had also his own opinions regarding his present employer's wife. He disliked the latter and thought her a "bad lot," whereas, like everybody of his class who was brought into contact with her, he had liked Mrs. Hungerford, and all that he had heard of her from those about her had made him respect her a great deal more than he respected Mrs. George Wollaston. Consequently, when the latter's maid questioned him about Marjory and Lord Heversham he had been extremely guarded in his replies, for he had felt sure that, for some reasons of her own, Mrs. Wollaston wished to find out all she could about the matter, and that whatever he said to her maid would be repeated to her. He had been very sorry to leave Hugh's service, but, when he married, Lord Heversham had thought that it would be more prudent to make a change. The man had seen and heard enough in his present situation to make him heartily despise those whom he served, and he was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to leave them. Though she was a little disappointed at being

able to extract no further information from the valet than that the lady she had met at Riva was certainly Mrs. Hungerford and that Lord Heversham had been on very intimate terms with her, Adela was sure that she had said enough to make Marjory feel that she had only to make some advance to her former lover to re-establish their old relations together.

Adela had expected that Marjory Hungerford would betray some signs of satisfaction when she heard that the Hevershams did not get on well together, but she was obliged to confess herself as completely puzzled by the evident distress with which Marjory had received her description of the state of things between them. The resentment which Mrs. Hungerford showed against Muriel Heversham was, she thought, decidedly to be encouraged. She did not doubt that she had succeeded in conveying so bad an impression of Lady Heversham to her listener's mind that the latter would require no further excuse for attempting to regain her old influence over Hugh.

Mrs. Wollaston sought in vain for a satisfactory

explanation as to why the name of Muriel Goring should have had such an effect upon Marjory. Could the two have known each other, she wondered.

Then her mind reverted to the points of similarity which had struck her as existing between Mrs. Hungerford and Muriel Heversham. It was a certain similarity only—not a likeness, and Adela could not describe exactly what the resemblance was. It was of so vague a character that probably most people would not have observed it. Her husband, for instance, had seen no trace of it. Some fleeting resemblance between the two, however, Adela was convinced that she saw—something in the turn of Mrs. Hungerford's head, or in her manner of holding herself, or of speaking—she could not tell which—that reminded her strangely of Muriel. It was absurd to suppose that there could be any relationship between them. Muriel came of a family which, if not known personally, was known about by the world in general. And Mrs. Hungerford? At this point Adela found that conjecture must cease. She certainly had no means of knowing who this Mrs.

Hungerford might have been, or, indeed, whether that were really her name or not.

Adela concluded that Mrs. Hungerford was in all probability Marjory's real name, and that for some reason of her own she had adopted that of White, perhaps because she was afraid of being identified as Lord Heversham's former mistress. She certainly did not look like a woman who would go about the world under assumed names, or like one of those ladies who change their names as easily, and as frequently, as they change their lovers.

The question worried and perplexed Mrs. Wollaston all the way to Paris. She felt sure that some mystery lay behind this woman, and she was by no means certain that there was not yet some existing tie between her and Lord Heversham. If there were, and she could discover it, she thought that her knowledge might be of some value. She would be very glad to see Muriel, whom she detested, driven by jealousy to some indiscreet action which would still further widen the breach between her and her husband. But she thought that it would be still

more useful if she could manage to possess herself of some secret in connection with Hugh's past relations with this woman which would give her some hold over all three. It would not be the first time that she had used her knowledge as a marketable commodity, and her silence on more than one occasion had fetched a very good price. Adela thought it quite possible that Muriel Heversham might know nothing of the fact that her husband had lived many years under the influence of one woman before he had married her. Notwithstanding what she had said to Marjory about Lady Heversham she believed that the latter really cared for Hugh and that she was unhappy because she knew that her affection for him was unreturned. The look which had come over Muriel's face when she heard her husband murmur another woman's name had been sufficient evidence of this. The seeds of doubt which had thus been sown in Muriel's mind could not fail to grow and bear fruit in jealousy were she once to be put in possession of the facts of her husband's long intimacy with Mrs. Hungerford,

and especially if she could be made to suspect that it still continued, and that the Marjory of his spoken thoughts and the latter were one and the same person.

The world being, after all, but a small place, Adela thought that it would be odd if she could not succeed in coming across somebody who could tell her who Mrs. Hungerford had been before her marriage—if she ever had been married. There must be someone, she argued, who had known her during the years she had been Hugh's mistress, and who might very likely know who and what she had been before she had lived in the Highgate villa of which James, the valet, had spoken. Hugh himself would know—but it would not be an easy matter to broach to him. Adela nevertheless determined that should no other opportunity of learning the truth present itself, she would question Lord Heversham about Mrs. Hungerford some day when he and she were alone together. She would bring into play that particular frankness of hers which she had occasionally found so useful and would tell him how she

had met a certain Mrs. Hungerford abroad who had said that he was a friend of hers, and who, curiously enough, George's servant had known when he was in his service.

Of course Hugh would immediately think that she, Adela, could never have heard that there had been anything between Mrs. Hungerford and himself, or she would not have so naïvely alluded to having met that lady, and he might, perhaps, tell her something about Marjory, thinking to put her off the scent by talking about her as an old acquaintance.

The morning after their arrival at Paris, the George Wollastons were strolling down the Rue de la Paix, looking into the shop windows, when they met an English acquaintance who asked them to breakfast with him at one o'clock that day at Voisin's. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Wollaston knew their would-be entertainer very well, and indeed Adela had rather snubbed him in London as the sort of man who is seen at a ball and nowhere else, and whose object in life seems to be to take elderly ladies, possessed

of titles, down to supper and then ask them to introduce him to some smart person in payment for his attentions. He had been introduced to Mrs. Wollaston in this manner, and had pursued her ever since, though she had never given him any encouragement, being fully aware he liked to be seen talking to her, and knowing, moreover, that there was nothing to be got out of him.

At Paris, however, things were different, and the Wollastons had not the slightest objection to accepting his invitation. It would save them forty francs, if not more, for George and Adela liked a good breakfast when they were in Paris. It would be a long time before the next London season when they would be likely to see their host again—quite time enough, at anyrate, to have forgotten the circumstance that he had ever paid for their food in the Rue St. Honoré. One o'clock found them seated, a party of four, at a table in the low, white-and-gold room at the Café Voisin, where a most luxurious little breakfast had been ordered. The payer of the bill apologised to Mrs. Wollaston for having no other

lady to meet her, and introduced to her and George Wollaston his friend Colonel Milner, who, he explained, was on his way home after seven years in India. Adela was delighted that there was no other lady of the party. She was hungry and wanted her breakfast, not to make fresh acquaintances, and besides, the women friends of a man like her host would probably be very tiresome people who would come up and talk to her in Hyde Park for years afterwards.

It was during the discussion of some plump little ortolans *en papillote* that their host, who prided himself upon knowing who was related to whom in society, asked the Wollastons whether they had seen anything of their cousins the Hevershams lately.

"Such a lovely woman!" he added enthusiastically, turning to his friend Colonel Milner. "You haven't seen Lady Heversham yet," he continued. "I think that she is quite one of the most beautiful women in London. Do you not agree, Mrs. Wollaston?"

"Yes," answered Adela rather coldly, "she cer-

tainly is very good-looking. I have not seen her since the summer," she added.

Presumably her host noticed the indifferent tone of voice in which she responded, for he continued his remarks with a little less enthusiasm.

"Of course Lady Heversham's is a style of beauty which some people would not admire—she is a little cold perhaps—a trifle too statuesque. I do not know her very well. Will you tell me, Mrs. Wollaston, is she as cold as she seems, or must one not judge from her manner?"

Mrs. Wollaston laughed slightly.

"I do not know her intimately," she replied. "Heversham is a cousin of my husband's, but since his marriage we have not seen very much of him. I am afraid I cannot tell if his wife is as cold as—well, as she looks."

"Who was Lady Heversham?" inquired Colonel Milner.

His friend cast upon him a look of commiseration in which was mingled some annoyance that a guest

of his should ask a question which betrayed such little knowledge of the London world, in the presence of so well known a person in society as Mrs. George Wollaston.

"She was a Miss Goring, daughter of a Colonel Goring who was once in the Guards," he replied.

"Oh," said Colonel Milner, looking up from his plate with some curiosity, "was she really? I knew her father slightly—many years ago. I knew his second wife, Lady Heversham's mother, and I must have seen Lady Heversham herself when she was a child."

"Dear me, Colonel Milner!" said Adela a little absently, "that is very interesting." She was looking critically at the dress and hat of a lady who was breakfasting at a little table opposite to theirs in company with a very young man,—an older one would not have invited her to breakfast at Voisin's later than half past eleven—and thinking to herself that she would adopt some of the ideas she discerned

in the lady's *toilette,* especially in the hat and the sleeves, to her own use.

"I remember that there were two children by the second marriage, both girls," pursued Colonel Milner, who was sitting with his back towards the object of Mrs. Wollaston's scrutiny.

"Lady Heversham has a younger sister with her," said his friend, "whom she takes out."

"How long is it since she married?" asked Colonel Milner.

"Rather more than two years," replied Adela.

"And no signs of an heir to the earldom," added their host, who wished to make it evident that he was well informed upon the matter. "That must be a great disappointment to Lord Heversham," he continued.

"There were only those two girls by the second marriage, I think," said Colonel Milner. "Goring's second wife was an odd woman, with a good deal of money. Goring, by-the-bye, was her name. He had to take it when he married her. When I knew

him first he was Maitland; afterwards he called himself Maitland-Goring. I wonder what has become of his only daughter by the first wife, Lady Heversham's half-sister, poor thing!"

Adela Wollaston ceased her study of the *toilette* opposite to her.

"Muriel Heversham's half-sister?" she asked in surprise. "I never knew of her existence; and why 'poor thing?'"

Colonel Milner hesitated and looked somewhat embarrassed. "I beg your pardon," he said a little confusedly, for he suddenly recollected that his fellow-guests were relatives of the Hevershams. "I thought of course that you knew all that story."

"I did not know that there was a half-sister, did you, George?" said Adela, appealing to her husband.

"Never heard of her," answered the latter, laconically.

"Do tell us about her!" exclaimed Mrs. Wollaston, excitedly. "How odd that we should never have heard her mentioned! Did she die?"

"No," replied Colonel Milner, still hesitating; "she did not die,—at least, not that I know of, though she may very well have done so since. Indeed, now I come to think of it, I remember hearing that she was dead, but I fancy that it was her family who gave it out for reasons of their own. You must forgive me, Mrs. Wollaston," he added; "it was very stupid of me to allude to the subject. I forgot for the moment that you and Lady Heversham were related."

"It is only the fact of my husband's cousin having married her that makes us so," said Adela, hastily. "Pray do not let that accident prevent you from gratifying our curiosity. If this mysterious stepsister did not die, you must really tell us what became of her, and why her existence has been hushed up!"

"It was a very sad story," said Colonel Milner. "I was in India when it all happened. It is ten or twelve years ago now, and I had just gone out there for the first time with my regiment. I remember that I was very sorry for her, all we young fellows

were,—but the women were dead against her; and you know, Mrs. Wollaston, that your sex can be uncommonly severe upon each other."

"We have to guard the sanctity of our homes," said Adela demurely, at which reply her husband went into a roar of laughter, and Colonel Milner looked as though he were not sure whether or no she were speaking seriously.

"As you insist on knowing the story, it is briefly this," he continued. "Colonel Maitland had one child only by his first marriage, and when this girl was about ten, some five or six years after his wife's death, he married Mrs. Goring. I believe that the second wife was never kind to her stepdaughter, and as her own two little girls grew older she became unreasonably jealous of her. My people knew the Maitland-Gorings fairly well; they were neighbours of ours in the country.

"To everybody's surprise Mrs. Goring violently encouraged a flirtation between her stepdaughter, Miss Maitland, and a very ill-conditioned fellow in a

cavalry regiment whom nobody liked. My mother always said that she forced the girl to marry him in order to get her out of the house. Anyhow, the marriage came off, and Mrs. Ramsay, as Miss Maitland became, went with her husband to India. There he behaved abominably to her, and at last took to drinking and ill-treated her. Then somebody else stepped in and got the poor girl to run away with him, promising to marry her when her husband divorced her. The husband brought a divorce suit against her, and the decree was about to be pronounced when he died of fever,—a fever which he had practically drunk and dissipated himself into. In the meantime, the man with whom she had bolted, a civilian, abandoned her, and left India. Her stepmother would not allow her to return to her father's house, and persuaded the latter to refuse to see her again or to have anything more to do with her. She left India, I believe, under another name, for, though we men were sorry for her, and thought that she had been very hardly treated, the ladies would not allow a word to be spoken in her defence

and made every place too hot to hold her. What happened to her afterwards I do not know; she seemed entirely to disappear, as people do disappear from the world sometimes. Perhaps she went into a convent, or perhaps she is dead. I have never heard her name mentioned by anyone; but when you told me that Lord Heversham had married a Miss Goring, the daughter of Colonel Maitland-Goring, I could not help thinking what a different life fate had apportioned her to that meted out to her half-sister."

Adela had listened to Colonel Milner's story with the most intense eagerness, and as he paused she drew a sharp little breath of excitement.

"Her name?" she asked abruptly—"her Christian name? Do you remember what it was?"

Colonel Milner hesitated for a moment.

"Her name?" he repeated. "I'm afraid—yes, I remember now! It was Marjory—Marjory Maitland. My people always used to speak of her as Marjory Maitland—Marjory Ramsay she became."

Adela Wollaston and her husband looked at one another across the little table.

Adela had made no remark when Colonel Milner answered her question regarding the Christian name of Lady Heversham's stepsister. She had expected what the reply would be, for, as Colonel Milner was telling his story, the reason for Marjory Hungerford's distress and dismay at hearing the name of Hugh's wife became clear to her. She made no comments upon Colonel Milner's story, however, beyond saying that it was a very sad one, and that it was not surprising that Lady Heversham had not cared to talk about her half-sister. If she had unexpectedly stumbled upon a secret, Adela meant to have the keeping of it in her own hands. So novel a scandal as that Lord Heversham's wife was the stepsister of his mistress would ring from one end of the United Kingdom to the other in twenty-four hours if once it leaked out, and Adela knew her host of that morning quite well enough to be sure that he would immensely enjoy the position of being the first person to start the story upon its career.

She rapidly reviewed the situation in her mind during the remainder of the time spent at breakfast.

Mrs. Wollaston knew very well that she could rely upon her husband not to speak of the matter until she should tell him to do so. There remained only one person upon whose course of action she felt quite unable to calculate. Would Marjory Hungerford make her lover aware of who it was whom he had married, or would she keep silent and let things work themselves out in their own way?

In any case, Adela thought to herself, she was probably in the possession of a piece of information which would be a very startling one to both Hugh and his wife, and one, moreover, which it would be very much to the interest of all concerned to prevent from becoming public property.

"Did I not tell you that there was something about that woman whom we met at Riva that reminded me of Muriel?" Mrs. Wollaston asked

triumphantly of her husband as they walked away from the restaurant together.

"You certainly did," he replied, "though I can't say that I see the least likeness between them. Good Heavens, Adela," he continued, "it will be very awkward for the Hevershams if this story gets about."

"It will be annoying for them, decidedly," said Adela, drily.

"Do you really suppose that that Mrs. Hungerford is the woman Hugh kept for so long, and that he then went and married her stepsister? I think you're jumping too fast at conclusions, if you ask me."

"Do you? Let us sum up the evidence in favour of my supposition. In the first place, we meet a lady whom your servant recognises as a Mrs. Hungerford, and as good as tells my maid that his late employer, Lord Heversham, was her lover. She recognises your servant, is overcome by her agitation, and speaks to him. It was very foolish of her to speak to him—but she did. Got flurried and lost her head, I suppose. She chooses to call herself Marjory White at the hotel, but we know that for

years she called herself Hungerford. The 'Marjory' was never dropped. Heversham let the name escape from his lips when he was half unconscious; do you remember? You know the construction we all put upon it, and how annoyed Muriel looked. In the second place, I talk to this lady about Heversham, and hear from her that she used to know him. She must have known him very well indeed to be so distressed at hearing that he and his wife didn't hit it off; and she must have known his wife also, or why should she have been so terribly agitated when I told her whom Hugh had married? I think I did not tell you at the time what a state she was in when I mentioned the name of Muriel Goring to her."

"But why do you conclude that this Mrs. Hungerford and the girl that Johnnie was telling us about at breakfast must be one and the same person?" asked George Wollaston.

"I don't absolutely conclude it, but I more than suspect it, and so do you!" retorted his wife. "You know as much of the story as I do, and can draw your own conclusions. I think we may take it for

granted that this Marjory Hungerford was the woman Heversham lived with. Why should she be so upset at hearing of his marriage with a Miss Goring? She knew that he had married, but she did not know the name of the girl. What could one name matter more than another unless she knew its owner? Then the likeness. You may not see it, but I tell you there is a decided look of Muriel in her,—just that sort of undefinable family look which would be natural in half-sisters."

"But," objected George Wollaston, "supposing they are half-sisters; you surely don't think that Hugh knew it, or his wife? That would have been a little too—well, a little too much, wouldn't it?"

"Of course I don't think they knew it!" interrupted Adela—"none of the three knew it, or had any idea of it. That is just the delightful part of it. It is we who know it,—you, I, and Marjory Hungerford. She is not likely to talk about it."

"Neither are we," said her husband; "it would be a damned shame to let it be talked about."

Adela looked at him with the faintest suspicion

of a smile upon her lips, though there was none in her eyes. Like all smiles with the lips alone, it was a disagreeable one.

"Naturally we shall not talk about it," she replied; "why should we? Muriel can be left in happy ignorance of her very peculiar position. Colonel Milner told us how completely Miss Maitland, or rather Mrs. Ramsay, was cast off by her family. That accounts for many things. No doubt Heversham never even heard that his wife had a half-sister. Muriel must be fifteen years younger than the woman we saw at Riva, so she would have been a child when all those scandals in India took place."

"It's an extraordinary combination of circumstances, if you are right in what you suspect," said Mr. Wollaston.

"It is," assented his wife, "but, *c'est l'imprévu qui arrive toujours,*—and certainly it has arrived in Heversham's case, unless I am very much mistaken."

"Nice fellow, that Colonel Milner," said George Wollaston; "the other's a bounder, but he gave us a

good breakfast. I take it that we're quite seventy-five francs to the good over that meal—what do you think, Adela?"

"I think," replied Mrs. Wollaston, "that it was worth much more than seventy-five francs." But she did not explain why she thought so.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. FORTESCUE'S plans were seriously disarranged. A visit to a country house which he was to have paid had fallen through. He had received a telegram from his prospective hostess to say that owing to the death of a relation the party of which he was to have been a member could not take place. Most people would have filled up the gap by proposing themselves for a visit to some other friends, but this was not Mr. Fortescue's way. He went where he was asked, if it suited him to do so, but since he had left fifty years behind him he had made a point of never proposing himself.

"If people invite an old man to come and stay in their houses," he would say, "I take it for granted that they wish him to come; but old men and old women ought not to suppose that it would be any

pleasure to their friends to see them unless they are told so."

So it came to pass that Mr. Fortescue found himself passing a week in the middle of October in his own rooms in the Albany. He had been staying in Yorkshire, and was to have gone on from there to visit the friends who had been obliged to put him off at the last moment.

He did not like having his autumn and winter arrangements upset. His visits were carefully mapped out for weeks ahead, and the intermediate weeks which he might have to spend in his own home in London during the winter were all duly entered in his engagement book as soon as he considered that his list of invitations in the country was fairly complete. It annoyed him considerably when by some accident he found himself obliged to be in some other place during a certain week than that which was already written down. When, however, such a catastrophe occurred, he went straight to the Albany, and nothing would have induced him to propose

himself elsewhere, or even to prolong his visit in a place where he was already staying.

On this particular October afternoon he was sitting by the fire in his library, reading. It was foggy and chilly without, and Piccadilly was very dreary with its wet pavements and the black trees of the Green Park with their few shrivelled leaves rustling sadly among the branches. The suite of rooms in the Albany was comfortable and cheerful enough, and the room in which Mr. Fortescue was sitting, and which he called his library, was especially so. Bookcases lined the walls half-way up to the ceiling, and the intervening space above them was hung with old prints and engravings on a warm red background. The room abounded in comfortable arm-chairs, covered with maroon-coloured morocco leather, which moved easily over the thick, soft carpet on noiseless castors; and on a magnificent polar bear-skin which served as a hearthrug there lay curled up in front of the fire a large Persian cat. The cat was Mr. Fortescue's constant companion when he was at home. He told his men friends that

its presence was the only opportunity an old bachelor like himself had of keeping in touch with the female character.

It was nearly five o'clock, and Mr. Fortescue was beginning to think that he would ring the bell and tell his manservant to bring him some tea. As a rule he went to one of his clubs at that hour, but he did not feel inclined to go out into the damp, and, moreover, he was reading a volume of old French memoirs which interested him. Tea on a little table near the fire, with his book and his cat, would be much nicer than walking into St. James Street, he thought.

He was about to get up from his chair and ring the bell when the door opened, and his servant came into the room with a card on a little silver salver.

Mr. Fortescue looked at the salver, not at the card. He was very particular about his plate. This was a piece of Queen Anne silver, and his quick eyes had detected a dent upon it. He made no remark, however, to the servant, for there was a

proper hour and a proper place for the discussing of household affairs. The dent on the silver would be inquired into on the following morning in the dining-room, after Mr. Fortescue had had his breakfast and glanced through his "Times."

"The lady wishes to know if you will receive her, sir," the manservant said to him, as Mr. Fortescue took up the card and looked at the name upon it.

"Mrs. Hungerford? I do not know anyone of the name. What does she want to see me about?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What sort of person is she?"

"I should say she was a lady, sir."

"Mrs. Hungerford!" repeated Mr. Fortescue to himself; "the name conveys something to me—yes, of course, now I remember! Hughie Hevershams's lady, by Jove! She has turned up again, has she? But what on earth can she want to see me for?"

"Where is this lady?" he asked of the servant.

"I asked her to wait in the drawing-room, sir, while I saw if you was at home."

Mr. Fortescue took a little time to consider before he spoke again. He could not understand why Mrs. Hungerford should suddenly call upon him and wish to see him, and, perhaps very naturally, he thought that she must have some claim to make, and that, remembering he was an old and intimate friend of Hugh's, she had come to him to air her grievances. It was not what he would have expected of her, from all that Hugh had told him, and from the opinion he himself had formed of her when he had seen her at Highgate. His first impulse was to tell his servant to say that he was not at home, but then he suddenly thought of Lady Heversham. Perhaps this woman might try to do her some injury, or might be trying to involve Hugh in some scandal. Mr. Fortescue had known of a good many unpleasant complications brought about by his friends' cast-off mistresses. Though he had always believed that Mrs. Hungerford was not of

that category, he did not altogether trust her, and this visit, he felt sure, must have been made for some very special reason.

For Hugh's sake, and, though he did not confess it to himself, still more for the sake of Hugh's wife, he decided that he would see Mrs. Hungerford and hear what she had to say. It might be that he could save Hugh from some annoyances and Lady Heversham from some pain. Mr. Fortescue knew that, as matters stood between them, it would not be advisable that any revelations should be made to Muriel which would still further estrange her from her husband. At anyrate, if this woman was inclined to be troublesome he would be the better able to warn Hugh of her intentions by seeing her and learning their nature.

"You can show Mrs. Hungerford in here," he said to the servant; "I had forgotten her name for the moment."

The volume of memoirs was deposited upon a little table by the side of his armchair, and Mr.

Fortescue got up and awaited his visitor's appearance with some curiosity. "She won't get much out of old Charlie Fortescue," he said to himself with a grim smile; and then he stooped down and stroked the cat. The creature swore at him, and that caused him to smile again.

The door of the library opened, and the servant announced Mrs. Hungerford, while Mr. Fortescue advanced, and greeted his visitor with a courtly bow.

There was a moment's pause while the man retired, and closed the door behind the visitor, and then Mr. Fortescue spoke. His glance had travelled over the tall, stately woman standing before him, and he noted how quietly, but yet how very well, she was dressed. This was not like a woman who had come, armed with threats, to try to extort money. He had seen some of these latter in his day, but they had not looked at all like this quiet, high bred woman, who returned his salutation with a bow as courteous and dignified as his own.

Mr. Fortescue thawed a little in his demeanour.

He appreciated good manners when he found them, and all the more because the longer he lived in modern English society the more rarely did he come across them.

"It is a long time since we met, Mrs. Hungerford," he said; "will you not sit down?" and he wheeled one of the armchairs towards her.

Marjory Hungerford took it and thanked him.

"Yes," she replied, "I have taken the liberty of calling upon you, though I feel that you are naturally very much surprised at receiving a visit from me. I have come to ask for your help and advice in a very difficult matter."

Her manner was composed enough, but her voice trembled slightly as she spoke.

Mr. Fortescue sat down at a little distance from her.

"My advice," he said rather drily, "is entirely at your service, if you think it worth having. As to my help, I am afraid that I must ask for what purpose it may be required before I could venture to promise it."

Marjory Hungerford bowed slightly. "You are quite right," she replied. "When I have explained to you why I want your advice you will understand why it is that I also need your help. If, when you have heard what it is that I want to consult you upon, you are unable to give me either, I will only ask you to consider our conversation as quite confidential."

Her reply somewhat surprised Mr. Fortescue, and its calm straightforwardness made a favourable impression upon him.

"Of course," he answered, "anything that you wish to tell me I shall treat as strictly private—unless," he added, "it should be of such a nature as to mean injury or annoyance to any of my friends. In that case, Mrs. Hungerford, I could make you no promise of secrecy."

Marjory loosened her fur mantle and threw it back on her shoulders.

"Mr. Fortescue," she exclaimed, "I am here in order to save friends of yours from injury and an-

noyance if I can do so—and those friends of yours are the two people I love best in the world. When I tell you this, perhaps you will trust me, and give me the help I ask for."

Mr. Fortescue made a little gesture with his hand.

"If that is the case, Mrs. Hungerford," he replied gravely, "you may rely upon me to do all I can to help you. May I hear what this matter is upon which you want my advice?"

As he spoke, he saw Marjory's face flush with sudden colour. It was but for a moment, however, and then she became as suddenly pale. She seemed to be nerving herself for some great effort, and after a second or two of hesitation she began to speak in rapid, uneven tones, very different from the calmness of her preceding ones. "I will tell you all—everything," she said hurriedly, "but first of all I must tell you why I have come to you. You will remember Hugh—Lord Heversham—bringing you down to see me when I lived at Highgate? You came and dined

with us there several times, I think. Of course you guessed our—our relations to each other."

"I gathered," Mr. Fortescue began, and then he hesitated and stopped short. It seemed impossible to enter into certain subjects with the woman who was speaking to him. He could only wonder mutely, as he had wondered when Hugh had first taken him to the villa at Highgate, how it had come to pass that she had accepted such a position.

"You were quite right," Marjory broke in abruptly, putting an end to his embarrassment. "I was his mistress, as I suppose you would call it, for nearly ten years, and because I know that you are one of his oldest friends I have come to ask you to help me to save him and his wife from trouble and unhappiness. He often spoke about you, Mr. Fortescue, as a very old friend of his family, upon whom he could rely. That is why I have come to you."

Mr. Fortescue nodded his head in silence, and waited for her to continue.

"I do not know what you will think of me," she resumed; "you must think me abandoned, immodest

—what you will! but, in order that you should understand everything, I must tell you my own history from the beginning. It is not a pleasant one for a woman to tell to a man, but I must tell it you, for it is only by knowing every detail that you can help and advise me."

And then Marjory Hungerford proceeded to relate her own story from the time she was driven to marry by her stepmother until her meeting with Hugh. She omitted no detail, slurred over no episode of her past years, but, conquering her shame and her emotion as she went on, she laid bare her whole life to this old man of the world whom she knew to be her lover's friend. If he was Hugh's friend, she argued to herself, he would deplore the unhappiness of the latter's marriage, and perhaps would tell her how she must act to insure his and Muriel's happiness, and how she could prevent that horrible thing which she had learned from Mrs. Wollaston at Riva from ever reaching their ears.

Mr. Fortescue listened in silence, without interrupting her with a single question. It was only when

Marjory came to describe her reasons for leaving her lover, and travelling in places where she could neither hear from nor of him, that he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Hugh told me why you had left him, and that he had asked you to marry him; but—I confess it to you with shame now, Mrs. Hungerford—I did not believe him."

"You mean that you thought I had deceived him—that I had some other reason?" asked Marjory.

"I am ashamed to say I did."

"But he — Hugh — he never believed that?" There was a piteous tone in her voice as she asked the question which caused Mr. Fortescue to clear his throat before he answered her.

"Never!" he said emphatically. "Hugh always believed in your motives for doing as you did. He was angry with me because I was sceptical."

Marjory drew a deep breath. "I am glad," she said, simply.

"But," said Mr. Fortescue, after a pause, "I do

not see how I can be of any service to you, Mrs. Hungerford, or why you should want my advice. The story you have told me is a very sad one, and, if you will allow me to say so, your disinterested affection for Lord Heversham, and your sacrifice of it to promote his happiness, does you infinite credit—such credit," he added, with a little smile, "that, you see, a worldly old man like myself would not believe in the possibility of so much generosity under the circumstances."

Marjory was about to reply when her glance fell upon a photograph in a silver frame which stood on a little table close to where she was sitting. It was the portrait of a woman, and something in the face made her bend forward and look at it more closely.

"Who is that?" she asked. "It is—Lady Heversham, is it not?"

If Mr. Fortescue had been surprised before he was more than astonished now.

"Yes," he replied, "that is Lady Heversham; but

may I ask how you come to recognise it? Surely you do not know her?"

Mrs. Hungerford did not seem to hear him. She was gazing long and earnestly at the portrait, and Mr. Fortescue saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"You surely do not know Lady Heversham?" he repeated, after a pause.

For all answer, Marjory took from the inside of her muff a little red-leather case and held it out to him. Mr. Fortescue opened it, and then looked in a bewildered manner from the case he held in his hand to the photograph on the table, and back to the case again.

"Yes," said Marjory, as if reading his thoughts, and forcing herself to speak calmly, "that is Lady Heversham when she was a child."

"But I do not understand, Mrs. Hungerford; how did you get this? The likeness between this miniature and that photograph is unmistakable; did you know Lady Heversham in those days? I do not see

how you could have done so, after what you have just told me."

Mr. Fortescue rose from his chair. He became suddenly suspicious that this woman was trying to impose upon him, and that she meant to work some injury to Muriel Heversham. In a moment the stiffness of manner with which he had first received his visitor returned, and, when he spoke again his tones were dry and decided.

"It seems to me that it is quite impossible that you can ever have known Lady Heversham," he continued, looking searchingly at Marjory, "and I do not see what the production of this miniature has to do with the very painful story which you have just told me. I think, if you please, that we will confine ourselves to the subject we were talking about. It related to Lord Heversham's bachelor days, and, therefore, we will leave Lady Heversham's name out of the discussion."

Marjory also started up from her chair, and her eyes flashed with a sudden anger as she heard the

words that barely concealed the suspicion and distrust which prompted them.

"Mr. Fortescue," she said quietly, "you misjudged me once, by your own confession. Take care that you do not do so again. I have told you how I came to be Lord Heversham's mistress, and why I ceased to be so. What I have not told you is my father's name, and my own before I married. You know me as Mrs. Hungerford. That is not my name. It is a name which I took when I left India."

"It was the name Lord Heversham knew you by."

"Yes; I did not wish to call myself by my husband's name when, had death not prevented him, he would have got his divorce from me. Equally, I did not wish to be known by my own family name when my father had disowned me. Lord Heversham himself never knew what that name was. When we decided to live together he promised that he would not ask it, as he knew the reason why I never wanted

to hear it spoken. I have wished to Heaven since that he had known it."

"Why?" asked Mr. Fortescue. He felt that he was getting to the point which he had always wished to know.

"Because my father was Colonel Maitland. I was his only child. He married again, as I told you, and his second wife was a Mrs. Goring. He took her name in addition to his own."

"Stop!" cried Mr. Fortescue, starting back from her. "Good God! Why, you are—Lady Heversham was—"

"Lady Heversham was Muriel Goring, my father's eldest daughter by his second wife. I am her step-sister. That is how I come to have that miniature of her as a child. It was a copy, given to me when I married and went to India. I have never seen her since."

"And you did nothing to stop her marriage? It was monstrous!" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue.

"I never knew of it," replied Marjory in a low voice; "all that I knew was that Hugh had married.

I read something in a newspaper which told me that, and I was glad. I hoped that he would be happy and forget me, and I made no effort to find out who it was whom he had married; I did not wish to know. It is not a month since I learned accidentally from a lady whom I met in a hotel abroad the name of Hugh's wife. But that is not the worst part of it," continued Marjory, despairingly. "If it had turned out a happy marriage I would have kept silence for both Hugh's sake and Muriel's; and while I lived I would never have crossed their p[redacted]

"And what makes you suppose that it is not a happy marriage?"

"Because this Mrs. Wollaston whom I met said so. She told me horrible things—things that made me understand that Hugh was miserable; that Muriel had married him for his name and money, and that she was a bad wife to him."

"Mrs. Wollaston!" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, "what Mrs. Wollaston?"

"Mrs. George Wollaston. Her husband, who was

there also, called her Adela. She said she knew Lord Heversham very well. Do you know her?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue between his teeth, "I know her. Go on, please. What else did she say about the Hevershams?"

"She said that Lady Heversham was making his life miserable, and that everybody said that there must soon be some scandal. When I heard this I asked her who Lady Heversham had been before her marriage, and then I knew this terrible thing. Now you can understand why I have come to you, Mr. Fortescue. I racked my brains to think of some friend of Hugh's whom I could trust with this story, someone who would know if anything can be done to make Muriel good to her husband and to set things right between them before it should be too late. It is not her fault, I am sure that it is not! She cannot have changed so much from the generous, tender-hearted child she used to be. She must have been forced to make this marriage by her mother, and, alas, I know that Hugh was not likely to have married her for love. His marriage was forced upon

him also for different reasons. Can you not understand the pain and horror that it is to me to think that I have brought all this misery upon the man I love, that the woman to whom I resigned him is faithless to him, and she, my own half-sister, my father's daughter?"

Marjory stopped suddenly and began to sob convulsively, with her face hidden in her hands.

Mr. Fortescue came and stood over her, laying his hand upon her shoulder with an almost fatherly gesture.

"Hush," he said soothingly; "do not distress yourself so much, but thank God that you came to me. You are all three, you and the Hevershams, the victims of a cruel combination of circumstances for which you are none of you responsible, so far as I can see. There is much that can be done, but we must act cautiously and discreetly. It will never do for this story to become known to the world. First of all, however, let me relieve your mind upon one point, and then I must ask you some more questions. You say that Mrs. Wollaston gave you to understand

that Lady Heversham was a bad wife, who cared nothing for her husband. She lied to you. Lady Heversham is an angel, one of the gentlest and most generous-minded women I have ever known. She loves her husband, and is unhappy because she knows that he does not return her love. She is unhappy, also, because she has no children, for she thinks that if she had them her husband's love would come to her. Lady Heversham is one of the most beautiful women in England, but nobody has ever been able to say a word against her. You may trust an old man when I say this to you. If I were younger, you might suspect that I had some other motive for singing her praises than that born of an intense admiration and respect for a woman with a noble nature."

Mr. Fortescue smiled a little as he said these last words, but the smile was rather a sad one, and the faintest suspicion of a sigh accompanied it.

Marjory raised her head from her hands and gazed at him in bewilderment as she listened.

"But why did that woman say such things of

her?" she exclaimed; "what possible object could she have in abusing her to a perfect stranger?"

"That is what we must find out," replied Mr. Fortescue. "You do not know Mrs. George Wollaston, but I do. That she had an object in talking to you as she did, and that that object was a bad one, I have no doubt. She is not a nice person, and she dislikes Lady Heversham, and has already tried to injure her in the eyes of the world."

"My poor Muriel," murmured Marjory, "I always knew you could not have changed so much. You do not know what a weight you have lifted from my mind," she continued to Mr. Fortescue; "but there still remains the terrible fact that I have told you, and there still remains the grief of knowing that Hugh and she are not happy together."

"It is something to have got rid of one burden," answered Mr. Fortescue, cheerfully; "we must now see what can be done with the others. I want to get to the bottom of your conversation with Mrs. Wollaston. How did you come to talk about the Hevershams with her?"

"I really forget how it began. The Wollastons had the table next to mine in the restaurant of a little inn at Riva. They had come from paying some visit in Austria, they said. Mrs. Wollaston began to talk to me—I suppose she thought it civil to do so, as we were the only Englishwomen in the place, and were sitting close to each other. I remember that she asked me if I knew Lord Heversham, and I was rather upset at hearing his name suddenly mentioned by a stranger. It was very weak of me," concluded Marjory, apologetically, "but I had not heard it for so long."

"And then she began to tell you stories about them?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Yes; and every word she said upset me still more, I am afraid."

"So that she noticed it?"

"I fear that she must have done so. I longed to change the conversation, but once having let out that I had known Lord Heversham, I could not do so."

"Ah—you told her that?"

"It escaped me. I was sorry afterwards that it had done so—but she could have had no clue as to who I really was. It struck me as curious that she should insist upon talking on that one topic only."

"And when you heard whom Hugh had married you were more agitated still?"

"It was a terrible shock to me. It made me feel sick. I told Mrs. Wollaston that the heat was too much for me, and went up to my rooms. I did not see her again, for she and her husband left that afternoon."

Mr. Fortescue sat thinking deeply for a few moments.

"As you know the Wollastons' name I conclude that they also know yours?" he asked presently.

"Not the name of Hungerford," answered Marjory. "I dropped that when I went abroad; I dreaded lest Hugh should trace my movements through it, and either follow me or write to me. I used the name of White. It is the name the public knows me by, in so far as it knows me at all. I thought that Hugh would never dream that it was I, if he

should see the name in any hotel list of visitors, for he knew how jealously I kept my professional name a secret. He was the only person who knew it."

Mr. Fortescue looked astonished. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but I am afraid I did not know that you had been on the stage—Hugh never told me that. He explained to me on one occasion that you were quite independent."

In spite of herself Marjory laughed outright.

"It is not a stage name," she replied, "it is the name under which I write—'Cecil White.' I dropped the Cecil because I did not care to expose myself to the curiosity of English tourists, and retained my own Christian name. Marjory White could convey nothing to anybody, and it was this name which the Wollastons would probably have seen in the hotel book at Riva."

"You are Cecil White, the novelist Cecil White?" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue. That dull October afternoon had certainly brought him many surprises, he thought.

"Yes," answered Marjory.

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Fortescue, and for a second or two he said nothing more. He had nothing to say, moreover, for he rarely read modern novels, and could not remember if he had ever read one of Cecil White's. He knew the name, of course, as that of a popular author, and he understood now what Hugh had meant when he had said that Mrs. Hungerford had independent means, and was not in the position of a lady whose wants in life were paid for.

"I sent in my card to you this afternoon as Mrs. Hungerford," continued Marjory, still smiling at the sight of his evident amazement, "because I thought you would remember that name and be more likely to receive me—if only to convince yourself that I was not working any injury to your friend," she added, a little maliciously.

Mr. Fortescue did not notice the innuendo; he was still following out his own train of thoughts.

"So Mrs. Wollaston could only have imagined you to be a certain Mrs. White who was acquainted with Lord Heversham?" he asked.

"That is all, certainly. Nobody there could have known me as Mrs. Hungerford," replied Marjory. "Stay," she exclaimed, "I am forgetting. There was one person who recognised me, and I him, but he was a valet travelling with some people who went away earlier in the day than the Wollastons. Do you remember a man Hugh had for some years called James? It was he; I met him in the street at Riva and spoke to him, for I could see that he knew me. Of course he had often been to the villa and had seen me there."

Mr. Fortescue muttered a little epithet which was not complimentary to Mrs. George Wollaston. "That explains it," he said aloud. "That man is now Wollaston's valet. Hugh parted with him when he married, and he went to the Wollastons. He is a very good fellow, far too good for the place he has got. Curiously enough he wrote to me not very long ago and asked me if I could get him another situation, as he wanted to change. Was he alone when you met him?"

"No, there was a maid walking with him."

"Of course! Mrs. Wollaston's maid. She probably talked about the meeting to Mrs. Wollaston and called you Mrs. Hungerford, whereas you were down in the book as Mrs. White. That would be enough to rouse Mrs. George's curiosity, even if the man had not said something about you and Heversham which was also repeated to her. It is all perfectly clear to me. In some way or another Mrs. Wollaston identified you with the Mrs. Hungerford whose name had been coupled with Lord Heversham's. You must forgive me for speaking plainly, but it is necessary. It was in order to assure herself that her suspicions were correct that she introduced Hugh's name into her conversation with you, and the effect it had upon you confirmed them. Her abuse of Lady Heversham I think I can understand also, but I need not tell you what I suspect her object was in making you believe that Hugh's wife was as she described her."

"If only she does not find out the relationship between Muriel and me!" said Marjory; "that is

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what I dread. If she is such an odious woman as you say, God knows what mischief she may not cause should she once get hold of that. My fear lest I had betrayed by my foolish agitation that Muriel was known to me has always haunted me; that is one of the reasons why I determined to come and try to see you. I have such a horror of the story getting about."

"She will certainly find it out eventually if she has any suspicion of it," said Mr. Fortescue, "and I am afraid that your manner may have caused her to suspect something, though it is not at all likely that she could hit upon the truth."

"We must prevent that at all costs," said Marjory, earnestly.

"We will try to do so; but, even if she does find out the truth, do not be alarmed. If Mrs. Wollaston means mischief I have something which will keep her quiet, unless I am much mistaken."

"But what do you advise me to do?" asked Marjory; "I cannot sit still and do nothing! Do you know, Mr. Fortescue, that I have often won-

dered whether I am not a very unnecessary person in the world? I think that if it had not been that I believed I might still be of some use to Hugh and Muriel, I should have put myself out of it, when I knew how things had turned out."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Fortescue, gently, "nothing is exactly what you must be content with doing for the moment. Any action on your part would probably precipitate the very catastrophe that you dread. If you think quietly over the situation you will see what I mean. It seems a hard thing to say, but you have been as one dead to your step-sister for so many years that you must resign yourself to continue to be so. If you do not, you will be playing into Mrs. George Wollaston's hands. She wishes to use you as a means of still further separating Hugh from his wife. Trust to me to watch how matters go. If Mrs. Wollaston finds out in some way or other that you and Lady Heversham are daughters of the same father she will try to turn her knowledge to practical purposes; more practical than merely setting about a scandal which,

after all, unpleasant as it is, casts no moral stigma upon either Hugh or his wife. You must remember that their position is unassailable, both morally and legally. The facts, if they were known, would shock a great many people, no doubt, but no other complications could arise."

"Except in Muriel's mind," said Marjory. "It would be an absolutely intolerable position for any wife to be placed in."

Mr. Fortescue rose and went to the bell.

"Lady Heversham shall be protected at all costs," he said, "but her protection can only be secured by your continuing to maintain the position you so generously assumed when you left her husband. I shall watch Mrs. Wollaston carefully. If she means to make mischief in this matter she will soon show her hand. It is my firm impression that she does mean to do so, but, as I have said before, I think that I have the means of preventing her from doing much harm, and, if it is necessary, I shall use them. And now," he added, "I am going to ring for some

tea. I am sure you must need it, and I was about to order it when you came in."

Half an hour afterwards Marjory left Mr. Fortescue, easier in her mind than she had been since the day on which she had met Mrs. Wollaston at Riva. She knew that in him she had found the trusty friend in whom she had longed to be able to confide. The interests of both Hugh and Muriel, she felt, were safe in his hands.

Of herself she did not care to think. She recognised the wisdom of Mr. Fortescue's advice. It meant that she must continue to the end the sacrifice which she had begun; that was all.

As she took leave of him, Mr. Fortescue asked her to give him her address in London, as it might be that he should want to communicate with her. He also begged her to allow him to come and see her.

"I shall be very glad if you will come," said Marjory, "for then, if you wish, I will show you some papers which will prove the truth of all you have heard concerning my identity. You must ask at my hotel for Mrs. White."

Mr. Fortescue accompanied her to the door. "I feel I owe you a deep apology for some ungenerous suspicions," he said, "both in the past and this evening. Can you forgive?"

Marjory smiled gravely. "There is nothing to forgive," she replied gently. "When a woman has wilfully put herself in such a position as mine she must expect to be misunderstood."

When his visitor had left him Mr. Fortescue walked across the room to a safe which stood beside his writing-table. Unlocking it, he took out a despatch-box, which he opened with a little key which hung on his watch-chain. From this box he extracted a long blue envelope, and out of the envelope he drew two or three letters and a slip of paper carefully folded up. He unfolded the latter and read it through attentively, and then replaced the letters and the paper in their cover, and returned them, duly locked up in the despatch-box, to the safe.

"Faugh!" he said to himself in a tone of disgust—"a woman like that deserves no mercy. She

is the most contemptible of all God's creatures—a kind of social fungus. It is incredible that the woman who was here just now and such beings as Mrs. George Wollaston can belong to the same order of creation."

And then he sat himself down in front of the fire and fell to thinking of the strange things which he had known in his life.

CHAPTER V.

It was now the middle of November, and Lord and Lady Heversham had not moved from Westmoreland since they had come down there after spending the summer in London. From the day before the commencement of the grouse-shooting they had never been alone, for Heversham had always been full of guests, and now a succession of parties for the covert-shooting was about to begin.

Muriel, it is true, had accomplished the desire which she had expressed earlier in the year, and she and her sister had gone up to Moor Hall together and had spent a delightful week by themselves, rambling about the fells upon a couple of rough shooting-ponies, while one of the keepers would follow with another pony and the luncheon-

basket, to prevent them losing their way, or getting into difficulties among some of the rugged limestone crags or treacherous bogs which they might come across in their wanderings. The bracing mountain air and perfect quiet were very refreshing after the heat and turmoil of a London season, and the two were thoroughly happy exploring the wildest parts of the vast tract of fell and moor which stretched away for miles behind the quaint old farm and manor-house of Moor Hall. Muriel's only regret was that the days which they could spend there were so few, but on the 12th every available room would be required for the accommodation of the men whom Hugh had invited to inaugurate the grouse-shooting, and two or three days before that important date she and Violet would have to leave their solitary haunts and return to Heversham, there to entertain the wives and daughters of the sportsmen.

Violet Goring was especially happy, for just at the end of her season in London she had become engaged to be married. The alliance was a suitable

one in every way, and, unlike the majority of engagements, it had been brought about by love on both sides and by no other consideration. Violet's *fiancé* was well off and deservedly popular, and Muriel was delighted at the result of her chaperonage of her sister, though she felt that she should miss her sadly. Her presence had often helped to diminish the feeling of reserve, and almost of shyness, which she struggled in vain to overcome when she was alone with her husband. She thought with thankfulness that her sister would never know the pain of feeling that, while she loved her husband, the latter had no love to give her in return. Both Violet and her future husband were obviously and honestly in love with each other, and Muriel could not help envying them their happiness while she rejoiced over it.

There was one drawback, however, to the Hevershams' and Violet Goring's satisfaction. The wedding was to take place in London either just before or just after Christmas, but Mrs. Goring had declared that it would kill her to come to England in

the middle of winter and wished the ceremony to take place at Mentone. There had been some little discussion on this point and Mrs. Goring had not made herself very pleasant over it. Since Muriel's marriage neither she nor Violet had seen much of their mother. They had met her in Paris, and had spent two or three days with her in her hotel there more for the sake of duty than for any pleasure they had in being with her. She resolutely refused to come to England, though Hugh and her daughter had repeatedly asked her to visit them at Heversham or in Carlton House Terrace.

Neither Muriel nor her sister was at all sorry that their mother remained on the other side of the Channel. Since the former's marriage Mrs. Goring had become more than ever capricious and difficult to deal with. Both her daughters felt that she was really delighted to have got rid of them, and they lived in perpetual expectation of the news that she was going to take a third husband and that they would shortly possess a reverend stepfather. The question as to where Violet's marriage was to take

place had caused relations to become very strained on both sides. Mrs. Goring declared that if the wedding was not celebrated at Mentone, and that if her dear friend, the Reverend Mr. Randal, who had spent many years in fighting Roman Catholicism and social immorality on the Continent, did not officiate at it, she would not be present at the ceremony. The future bridegroom and his family, who were hunting people, strongly objected to being dragged out to Mentone in the middle of the hunting season, and Violet herself flatly refused to be married anywhere but in London, or to allow the Reverend Randal to have any voice, officiating or otherwise, in the matter. Lord Heversham shrugged his shoulders and said that the contending parties must settle it among themselves, but that a few return tickets to Mentone and an eighteen hours' journey were not things worth having a family row about.

Matters were still in this state in November, and seemed likely to continue so, as neither side would give way. Muriel and her sister, however, were too

happy to let Mrs. Goring's acrid letters trouble them very much. There was another reason why they should be happy,—a reason which had nothing to do with Violet's engagement. Muriel had confided to her sister that she had every reason to believe that she should become a mother before many months were over. As the weeks had passed, this had become a recognised fact, and the knowledge that a child was at last to be born to them had had a wonderful effect upon both Lady Heversham and her husband. Hugh was no longer so depressed and despondent as he had frequently been, and Muriel, noting the difference in him, thought, with a thrill of joy at her heart, that if she could only have a son all would be well between her and her husband, and that the love for which she was yearning would come to her with the child.

In the second week of November the Hevershams and Miss Goring were engaged to pay a visit in the neighbouring county of Lancashire for four days' covert-shooting. The day before the date fixed for their visit, Muriel was not very well, and her hus-

band, who had become, since he had been told of her condition, extremely anxious that she should do nothing to overtire herself, or that would be injurious to her in any way, insisted upon her telegraphing to say that she was unwell and would be unable to come. He himself, he told her, must of course go, for the shoot was an extremely good one, and, except for some imperative reason, he could not possibly fail their hosts at the last moment. It was settled that Violet should accompany him, as her betrothed was to be one of the party and had been specially asked to meet her. Muriel was not sorry to have an excuse for stopping at home, and as she would have to entertain a large party the following week for their own covert-shooting she was glad of the opportunity of enjoying a few days' quiet. She never had any lack of employment at Heversham. The place itself and her garden were a constant delight to her, and she was very fond of the country around it. The poor people and the sick for miles round were also a perpetual source of interest and occupation. Lady Heversham had no idea of play-

ing the part of the Lady Bountiful of the district. She did not do charities, but she did do kindnesses; and it was the delicacy and tact with which she did them, and the tender thoughtfulness for the feelings of those for whom she did them, that had won for her since she had become mistress of Heversham the love and respect of her poorer neighbours wherever her husband owned any property, and also in many places beyond the boundaries of his estates. She had that rarest of all gifts, the gift of interesting herself in the interests of others; of putting herself into their place and seeing things from their point of view. Lady Heversham had a theory that if people could be made happy in their surroundings they would probably also be made good. It was not a theory which she talked about, but she acted upon it with some success. There were few rough mill-hands in the cloth-making towns of the neighbourhood who had not a pleasant look and a smile for Lady Heversham. If they had not experienced her sympathy themselves they knew of others who had. Their faces lighted up and they forgot to

scowl sullenly when they met Muriel driving her ponies as they went to or from their work.

In these things she had found herself in perfect accord with her husband. Hugh had never interfered with her methods, and she had brought him much popularity in consequence. He had opened Heversham to the people as the place had never been opened in all its history, and nobody was the worse thereby, while a great many were considerably the better. The days had ceased, Lord Heversham told his scandalised Tory acquaintances, when those who happened to own beautiful country places could keep them hermetically closed for the enjoyment of a privileged few, unless, indeed, they wished to have their places taken from them by legislation at some not very distant time.

Hugh and his sister-in-law left Muriel behind them when the day came on which they had to pay their promised visit in Lancashire. They did not start from Heversham till late in the afternoon, and when they reached their destination everybody staying in the house had gone to their rooms to dress

for dinner, and only their host and hostess were in the drawing-room to receive them. Hugh made many apologies for his wife, and then he and Violet were also shown to their rooms. Violet asked her maid, while she was dressing, whether she knew who was staying in the house, but the latter had not had time to ascertain. The only people she knew of, she said, who were there, were Mr. and Mrs. George Wollaston,—she had met Mrs. Wollaston's maid as she came upstairs. Violet Goring was not over-pleased to hear that Adela Wollaston was one of the party. She did not like her, for it had come to her knowledge that she had said disagreeable things in London that year about Muriel, and that she had been for ever deploring the fact that the Hevershams got on so badly together. Violet was glad that Muriel had not come, for her sister, she knew, had taken a dislike to the Wollastons after hearing from Mr. and Mrs. Heylands how the latter had fared at their hands in Park Lane.

The Heylands had come over to Heversham for

a day or two in August, and Mr. Heylands, who had not yet finished paying the bills which, thanks to their good offices, his London season had brought down upon him, had been very plain-spoken as to his opinion of Mr. and Mrs. George Wollaston. Mrs. Heylands could not mention Adela's name without the tears rising in her eyes, for, when the costs of the famous concert came to be dealt with, she, poor soul, had gone through a very bad quarter of an hour with her husband in consequence. Miss Goring consoled herself with the thought that she was not likely to be thrown very much with the Wollastons, even though they were staying in the same house with her. There was another member of the party who would monopolise most of her time during the four days that she was to remain under the same roof with them.

When they came downstairs before dinner, Lord Heversham and Violet found a large party assembled, all the members of which they knew. Violet could not help noticing that her brother-in-law was in better spirits than she ever remembered

to have seen him. She was not the only person who remarked a certain change in him, and, after dinner, when the ladies were alone together, Adela Wollaston was the first to comment upon it.

She wondered what had happened since the summer, and whether he had by any chance fallen in love with his wife. She questioned Violet Goring as to why her sister had not been able to accompany them and what was the nature of her indisposition; but Violet did not wish to gratify her curiosity, and replied that a chill had prevented Muriel from coming at the last moment.

Hugh, however, was not so discreet. When, later on in the evening, Mrs. Wollaston asked him the same question, he corroborated Violet's story as far as the chill was concerned, but added that Muriel's state made it necessary for her to be very careful of herself for the present, and not to expose herself to much fatigue. Adela could not fail to understand what he meant, and indeed she had lately heard some rumours that Lady Heversham

was at last going to have a baby. She watched Hugh narrowly after having heard the confirmation of these rumours, and drew her own conclusions from the evident alteration in his manner and spirits. She noticed, too, that he spoke of his wife more frequently than before, and that when he did so it was not with the same indifference as of old.

Since the breakfast at Voisin's, Adela had in vain tried to hit upon some means of assuring herself beyond all possibility of doubt that Mrs. Hungerford and Colonel Maitland Goring's unfortunate daughter were one and the same person. In this, however, she had been completely baffled. There was nobody, so far as she knew, to whom she could turn for information, and nobody could tell her except Mrs. Hungerford herself. Colonel Milner had declared that he had no idea whether the Miss Maitland who caused so much scandal when he was a much younger man in India were even alive, and he would certainly never have heard of Mrs. Hungerford, for he had only known Lord Heversham by

name and had spent much of his life out of England.

Nevertheless, Adela felt certain of her ground, and was quite convinced that if she should choose boldly to assert as a fact that Lord Heversham had married the half-sister of his mistress the investigations which must inevitably follow such a startling declaration would infallibly result in proving that she was perfectly right. Mrs. Wollaston had certain private and personal reasons for being very strongly inclined to risk the venture. When she had heard that she would meet the Hevershams and Violet Goring in Lancashire that November, she had seriously considered whether she would not tell Lord Heversham what she believed that she had discovered, and declare to him that she was in a position to prove her words, if necessary. She would take care that Hugh should understand what she should expect in order to make it unnecessary for her to do so.

Adela was in urgent and immediate want of ready money. The proceeds of the speculation in

Mr. and Mrs. Heylands had not been of sufficient importance to do more than temporarily satisfy her many creditors. For two years there had been nobody like her South African millionaire. Mr. Heylands had paid to be brought out in London society, but he had not paid for other things as the South African had done, and, moreover, he had never shown the slightest desire to buy them from her, though she would have been ready enough to sell them and had tried to make him understand that he need have no fear of asking for them. She had hoped for satisfactory results from the visit to San Stefan in September, but Baron Schmidt had not responded as he had responded in days gone by, when he had not established his footing firmly enough in the London world. Added to her other difficulties, her husband had lost a good deal of money in the city, and altogether the year, save for the temporary relief extracted from the Heylands, had gone very badly with them both. George Wollaston was always impressing upon her that money must be got somehow, and Adela was rapidly be-

coming nervous and irritable. She thought angrily that she was losing ground in society, and that other women were coming on who were better looking than she was. A few years ago it had been easier to find a way out of these difficulties. There had always been somebody who was willing to step into the breach and pay, but now—well, the somebody was harder to find, and Adela was obliged to confess to herself that he would not be easier to find as the years went on.

Money she must have, however, for anything was better than dropping out of society; and by society Adela meant her own particular set. Nobody knew better than she did that, in this set, a man was valued for what he could spend and a woman for what she could get men to spend on her. She had been very successful for some years, but there were signs, slight as yet, but nevertheless unmistakable, that her power was waning.

The more Adela Wollaston allowed her mind to dwell upon her meeting with Mrs. Hungerford and

upon what she had subsequently heard from Colonel Milner at Paris, the more strongly she was tempted to turn such knowledge as she now possessed of Hugh Heversham's affairs to good account. Even though Hugh did not care about his wife she felt that he would naturally wish to do everything in his power to prevent so unpleasant a rumour being circulated. At anyrate, Adela thought the game was worth trying. Hugh was a very rich man, and he was also a man who was known to hate unpleasantnesses of any sort, and the chances were that he would be only too ready to come to terms with her for keeping so disagreeable a story from the ears of the world. She made up her mind that she would run the risk of Hugh's insisting upon an investigation into the matter. Very probably he would believe her statement that she had positive proofs of what she said and would not seek to challenge it for fear of bringing the matter into publicity.

When Mrs. Wollaston found herself in the same house with Hugh and had learned that Muriel was

after all expecting her confinement, she determined to put her plan into execution without further delay. Hugh would now be more than ever afraid of the story getting about, for if it reached Muriel's ears in her present condition, who could tell what might happen? When she saw how much more cheerful and light-spirited Lord Heversham was than she had ever before seen him, and how much more interest he evidently took in his wife, Adela thought that it argued well for the success of her undertaking. There was, moreover, another favourable point in the situation. If Marjory Hungerford was Muriel's half-sister, she was also Violet Goring's, and Hugh would certainly not wish the story to become known when the latter was on the eve of going to be married. Mrs. Wollaston had kept her intentions a secret from her husband. She knew that, unscrupulous as he was as to how he, or his wife either for that matter, made money, he would certainly draw the line at attempting to levy blackmail on the head of his mother's family. She recollected how decidedly he had expressed his views

at Paris on the necessity of not talking about that which she believed they had discovered, and she had never again alluded to the subject to him, preferring that he should think that she also was determined not to allow it to go beyond their two selves.

Adela waited until the shooting-party was about to break up before approaching Hugh with her intelligence. It was in the evening after dinner that she seized the opportunity of finding herself talking to him alone in one of the drawing-rooms. The remainder of the party were sitting about in the other rooms. Some were playing Bridge, while others had adjourned to the billiard-room, where a somewhat noisy game of pool was going on. Adela was casting about in her mind as to how best to lead up to what she wished to say. It was not an easy conversation to begin.

"I am delighted to hear the news about Muriel," she said, after making a few trifling remarks about the day's sport. "Of course you must be very anxious that it should be a boy."

"Yes," replied Hugh, "a son, as you know, is very much wanted at Heversham; but," he added, with an air of satisfaction, "if that is not to be now, one may reasonably hope that it will come in time. At anyrate a beginning will have been made."

"That is everything!" said Adela. "Probably now she will have not one, but half a dozen."

Lord Heversham laughed. "That would be a little too much of a good thing," he replied. "I should be quite content with two boys."

"A second barrel in case the first should miss," returned Mrs. Wollaston. "Yes, it is always a good thing, I suppose, when there is a second son to fall back upon,—that is to say in the case of you lucky people who are rich and have got something to leave to your children. Paupers, like us, are better with none at all. It is hard enough work to have to provide for ourselves without the extra anxiety of having children to think about. At anyrate," she added markedly, "I am glad that you are happy

now, and that the object for which you married seems about to be fulfilled."

Hugh stared at her for a moment. He wondered why she should care whether he were happy or not. The remark annoyed him, and he answered rather stiffly:—

"You are very kind. I do not know, however, why you should think that I have not always been happy."

Mrs. Wollaston opened her ostrich-feather fan and fanned herself slowly.

"Perhaps not," she replied. "The world does not look upon you as models of matrimonial felicity, but the world's opinion, after all, does not very much matter. What does matter is that you should be able to keep your happiness, if you have really been so fortunate as to find it."

Hugh looked at her in astonishment. "I really don't know what you mean, Adela," he said; "you seem to be talking in parables. May I ask what is the hidden meaning in your words? Perhaps you have heard of some mysterious evil which is threaten-

ing me or Muriel. Please tell me the worst,—forewarned is forearmed, you know!"

Adela Wollaston rose from the sofa on which they were sitting.

"Come into one of the other rooms," she said, "where we shall not be disturbed. Here we shall be interrupted, and I have something to tell you that you would not wish should be overheard. Come!" and she walked rapidly through the rooms to one at the end of the suite—a little room lined with books, into which it was not likely that any of the rest of the party would penetrate. Hugh followed her with an ever increasing wonder at what she could be about to communicate to him. For a moment a suspicion crossed his mind that it was something about his wife,—some ill-natured gossip which she had heard and wanted to repeat to him. He had heard it said that Adela was fond of making mischief between husband and wife, and he wondered, with some little amusement, whether she intended to try to do so between him and Muriel. If she did, he would have to show her that she

was wasting her time. If he had no love for Muriel he had perfect confidence in her, and Adela Wollaston was the last person in the world, he thought, who could shake it. Nevertheless, the idea that there might be some story in circulation about his wife made him feel angry. He realised that it did so with a slight sensation of surprise, and wondered why he should care. At least he would hear what Adela's mysterious communication was, if only to show her that any interference on her part was unnecessary.

"Now, Adela," he said, as they found themselves alone in the little room, "nobody will think of coming in here; they are all busy over their cards and their billiards. Tell me, what is this mysterious matter about which you wish to speak to me? I am all attention."

Adela Wollaston sat down in a low chair by the fireplace and Hugh stood beside her, leaning with his back against the chimney-piece.

"You know that George and I have been abroad this autumn," she began.

"Yes; somebody told me you had gone to Hungary to stay with that objectionable little Jew, Baron Schmidt. I don't think that I admire your choice in friends,—but that is your affair, not mine. But what has your having been abroad to do with the matter?"

"A great deal," replied Adela, "as you will see when you have heard what I have to tell you."

"I should not have thought that anybody you may have met at San Stefan—is not that the name of your Hebrew friend's place?—could have had much to tell you about me, or about my affairs! But please go on."

"Could Mrs. Hungerford tell me nothing about you or your affairs?" asked Adela, abruptly.

Hugh started violently. He had been wholly unprepared to hear Marjory's name on Mrs. Wollaston's lips.

"*Mrs. Hungerford!*" he exclaimed. "Do I understand you to say that you met Mrs. Hunger-

ford at San Stefan—staying with Schmidt? It is impossible!"

Adela watched his agitation quietly. It would be amusing, she thought, to let him believe that she had met Mrs. Hungerford at San Stefan, for he would wonder why and in what position she had been there. It would not serve her purpose, however, to say so, and she answered with an ill-concealed sneer.

"No! hardly that. Baron Schmidt may be a very objectionable person, but I imagine that he would scarcely ask his guests to meet ladies of Mrs. Hungerford's antecedents."

Lord Heversham turned and looked at his cousin's wife. "I think," he said cuttingly, "that you are hardly a competent judge of Mrs. Hungerford's antecedents."

Mrs. Wollaston reddened with anger. "Perhaps not," she replied; "one does not, mercifully, often come into contact with that sort of person. I met Mrs. Hungerford abroad the other day,—it does not matter where,—and I learned quite accidentally her

history. No," she added, as Hugh was about to interrupt her, "I do not mean her history as far as regarded her former relations with you. That is known, of course, to many people. If it were that alone there would be nothing to say,—nothing to fear. You and she presumably made your terms with each other when you married. Let me ask you one question—it shall be only one. Did you know the real name of this lady who called herself Mrs. Hungerford during the years that she—enjoyed your protection?"

Hugh stared at her blankly. For a moment he did not know how to answer her. He had never known Marjory's real name, for he had never forgotten his promise that he would not ask it of her.

For an instant he hesitated, but it was for an instant only, and when he spoke his reply was not that which Adela Wollaston had anticipated.

"You seem to be labouring under a great mistake, Adela," he said very coldly. "I should advise you

not to mix yourself up in matters which do not concern you, if you will pardon me for saying so. If you have heard ill-natured stories about Mrs. Hungerford, and people have at any time coupled my name with hers, I am very sorry; but nobody ought to know better than yourself that people are always ready to invent stories about their friends. It is very annoying, of course, but, after all, it does not much signify. If it did, you would hardly be staying here at this moment. Believe me, Mrs. Hungerford can take very good care of her own reputation. It is quite true that I have known her for many years."

"As Mrs. Hungerford—yes," said Adela; "but, I again ask you, did you know that the name was merely an assumed one, and who she really was?"

"Of course I did!" replied Hugh. "Why should I not?"

"Why should you not?" repeated Mrs. Wollaston in amazement. "Do you mean to say," she continued, and then she stopped short.

"I see!" she resumed, after a moment's pause. "You are defending this *soi-disante* Mrs. Hungerford's honour and honesty. It is very chivalrous, very gentlemanlike of you. Many men are not so punctilious, but, I am sorry to say, my dear Heversham, that I cannot believe you. Of course it is perfectly right that you should try to shield this lady's reputation, but you evidently do not know to what you are exposing yourself and your wife when you assert that Mrs. Hungerford's real identity was known to you before you married Muriel."

"Muriel!" exclaimed Hugh. "What has it got to do with Muriel? Look here, Adela," he continued in a lower voice, "I will not have my wife's name brought into this matter. You must understand that once for all, please."

Mrs. Wollaston looked at him steadily. "I am only anxious to prevent your wife's name being brought into the matter," she said drily. "As you say that you know who Mrs. Hungerford is," she added, "and that you knew it before you married, perhaps you will tell it to me."

Hugh thought that most probably Mrs. Wollaston had in some way discovered Marjory's identity with the writer Cecil White, though what advantage she expected to derive from the discovery he could not conceive. This also, however, was a secret which he had promised Marjory never to reveal. "Pardon me," he replied quietly, "but I do not see why I should tell you anything of the kind. If, as your words imply, you know the answer to your question, what is the use of asking it?"

"Then," replied Adela, with a short laugh, "I will tell you. Possibly you will understand why the matter affects your wife as well as yourself—but, after all," she added, "if, as you declared just now, there has never been anything against Mrs. Hungerford's reputation, the matter is of very little importance; I am afraid that the world, when it hears the story, will not think so. As you know, then, Mrs. Hungerford is not Mrs. Hungerford at all. She is Mrs. Ramsay—a woman whose husband would have divorced her—had divorced her, only he died before the decree was pronounced. And Mrs.

Ramsay before she married was Marjory Maitland, the only daughter of Colonel Goring by his first wife, and, therefore, your wife's half-sister. But of course this is no news to you. I am telling you what you, and no doubt your wife, already know. You must really allow me to compliment you upon the possession of a most unusual *ménage.*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE distant murmur of conversation and laughter and the click of the billiard balls broke the silence which ensued at the conclusion of Adela's speech. As Mrs. Wollaston spoke she turned her eyes away from Hugh, unable to bear his steady and somewhat mocking gaze. His pointed allusions to certain stories which had reflected upon her own reputation had angered her deeply, but she had been determined not to lose her temper, and had therefore affected not to notice them. She waited anxiously for his reply to her startling communication, and receiving none she felt a thrill of satisfaction. She had won her venture, at least in part. Had Hugh in reality known who Marjory Hungerford had been he would immediately have refuted her statement by an indignant and contemptuous denial which would

have shown Adela that she was wrong in her calculations. She had not believed him for a moment when he had asserted that he had known Marjory's real name. His hesitation had not escaped her, and she felt convinced he had only declared that he had done so because he did not wish her to think that Marjory had concealed her identity from him.

At length she turned her head and looked at Hugh. She met his eyes fixed upon her in horrified bewilderment, and, had she wanted any further proof that what she had just told him had come upon him as a terrible and totally unexpected blow, the expression of his face would have been a sufficient one.

"Marjory—Mrs. Hungerford—and Muriel," he stammered forth in broken utterances. And then he burst out laughing.

"Are you mad, Adela?" he exclaimed in a harsh undertone. "What inconceivable mare's nest have you got hold of now? Good God! do you know

what you are saying? Why, it would be horrible—disgusting—!"

"Would it?" she answered calmly. "Why so? I am not mad at all, and what I have discovered is no mare's nest, but a very real fact. Why should the coincidence of your wife being Mrs. Hungerford's half-sister be so very horrible? I thought that you said just now that Mrs. Hungerford had no need to fear for her reputation? If that be so, I do not see why you should think a marriage with her stepsister so terrible a thing."

Hugh did not reply. He felt that this woman was playing with him, as a cat might play with a mouse.

Suddenly he strode up to her and laid his hand roughly on her arm.

"Your proof!" he exclaimed. "Never mind why it would be a terrible thing; that is no affair of yours. You have made a statement about a lady who, you say, is connected with my wife. I will have your proofs, firstly, that this lady—Mrs. Hunger-

ford—is the person you declare her to be, and, secondly, even if she be so, why I should not have married her half-sister, or her own sister had I chosen to do so."

Adela was prepared for the question, and she gave a little mocking laugh as she replied to it.

"My dear Heversham," she said, "it is not likely that I should make such an assertion to you without being able to prove it. You forget that I told you I had met Mrs. Hungerford. As a matter of fact I was in the same hotel with her for some time. We became very intimate."

"Where?"

"That is not necessary to tell you. Moreover, I do not think that she would wish you to know of her whereabouts at present."

"And was it from her, from Mrs. Hungerford, that you learned this story?"

It was now Adela's turn to hesitate.

"Yes," she said, after a pause.

"I do not believe it!" exclaimed Hugh. "You are lying. Do you expect me to believe that Mrs. Hungerford would tell such a story of herself to a stranger,—to an acquaintance made in some foreign hotel?"

Mrs. Wollaston shrugged her shoulders.

"You are not very polite," she said; "nevertheless, I did hear it from Mrs. Hungerford,—Mrs. Ramsay, I should rather say, for as her divorce was not actually pronounced, I conclude that that is her legal name."

A curious smile came over Lord Heversham's face.

"You assure me that you heard this story from Mrs. Hungerford herself," he said quietly; "that, in fact, she told you she was a divorced woman, or as good as divorced; that she had lived with me—I put it plainly, because it is necessary to speak plainly; that she and my wife were daughters of the same father,—is this what Mrs. Hungerford told you?" he added.

"Yes," replied Adela Wollaston, firmly, "that is what I gathered from her. You men are very extraordinary beings!" she continued. "You seem to think that you can get rid of your mistresses, whom perhaps you have loved and have allowed to love you for years, much as you can your servants if they do not suit you. You pay them what you consider to be due to them, and are very indignant if you hear any more about them. Well—sometimes you come across a woman who rebels at being suddenly paid off and abandoned simply because you consider you ought to marry and you do not want to have any scandals, or for some other equally convenient reason. You look at the matter from your own point of view, but you never admit that the woman may look at it from hers."

"So Mrs. Hungerford is vowing vengeance upon me for having married?" asked Hugh. "You say she told you that her relations with me had been of such a nature as to give her a right to be angry at my marriage," he added.

"That I do not know," answered Adela, who felt

uncertain of her ground. She did not like these questions of Hugh's. "You must know better than I what her conduct under the circumstances would be likely to be. She would hardly confide her intentions to me."

"Why not, since she confided so much to you?"

"Because she knew that she was talking to a relation of yours—who would probably put you on your guard. She did not know whom you had married, apparently. She learned that from me."

"And when she heard who my wife had been she told you the relationship?"

"Not willingly—not in so many words, indeed—but she was so terribly agitated and distressed when she heard Muriel's name that I knew of course that she must have been very well acquainted with her—no stranger's name could have moved her so much. Mrs. Hungerford's agitation was subsequently made the more intelligible to me by what I heard from

a person who knew her and who knew all about her. One cannot perpetually conceal one's identity in this world—it is a small place, after all."

"So," replied Hugh, "you heard that Mrs. Hungerford was Colonel Goring's daughter from another person—not from herself?"

"I actually heard it in words—yes," said Adela, "but," she added, "I should have been none the less certain that a relationship of some kind existed between her and your wife even had I not had my suspicions confirmed in the most indisputable manner. We need not discuss the matter as to why I know what I have told you to be a fact. Believe me, I should not have told you of it were I not absolutely certain that what you have heard from me is the truth."

Adela paused to watch the effect of her words, and she could not but see that it was great. What had convinced Hugh that her statement was not one which could be lightly dismissed was the knowledge she displayed of Marjory's past history. The latter

had herself told him years ago, when they had first met on the Lake of Como, of all the troubles of her married life, of her flight from her husband with another man; the divorce proceedings which were only interrupted by her husband's death, and her abandonment by him whose conduct she had believed was only influenced by love for her and a desire to shield her from outrage and unhappiness. Adela's details had been correct in every point, but she had committed herself to one fatal mistake, and Hugh was quick to perceive it. She had judged Marjory as she would have judged any other woman who had consented to live with a man on other terms than those of matrimony. Every word which she had said had made it perfectly clear to her listener that she had not the slightest conception of Marjory's character, or of the conditions under which they had lived together and parted. Adela Wollaston had pictured to herself the ordinary, sordid barter of passion for money. She could not realise that love might have entered into the matter, and therefore she had never thought of Marjory but as of a

mistress, who had been paid off and given her *congé* when it became necessary or convenient for the man with whom she had lived to marry. That was evident from all she had said. She had, in her ignorance of the nature of the woman whom she professed to know so well, tried to make Hugh believe that Marjory had lamented over her grievances, and had spoken as though she considered herself to have been badly treated by her lover. This had been of itself quite sufficient to rouse Lord Heversham's suspicions, and, knowing what he knew and being fully aware that the whole of Marjory's conduct since his succession to his title had been influenced by no other motive than that of sacrificing her love for him to his good and to her own sense of honour, he had been instantly convinced that Mrs. Wollaston was lying when she declared that she had learned her story from Marjory herself.

There was something, he felt, behind all this story,—something that he would get to the bottom of. Adela must be acting in concert with some

other person, who was certainly not Marjory. He trembled to think lest the part of her story which would make his wife and Marjory daughters of the same father should be true. Adela had been correct in all else she had said about Marjory, and why should she not be correct in what she had said regarding her parentage? The thought was intolerable, for, if it were true, what a position for Muriel! She, at least, was innocent, and lately he had begun to understand that she loved him, and had not married him, as he had once suspected, simply in order to get away from her mother and have a home of her own for herself and Violet. He had never thought that she had married him to be Lady Heversham and have plenty of money to spend. If he had at first suspected it, a very short time of living with her and of observing her character had caused him completely to dismiss such an idea from his mind. But now, if this horrible thing were true, and it should become known, what a cruel thing it would be for her!

Hugh was determined not to commit himself, and

he would make no admission which could in any way compromise Marjory. The first shock of dismay at what he had heard from Adela Wollaston had passed, and he was able to face the situation calmly and to reason upon it. His one fear was lest the story should reach Muriel's ears.

"And now that you have told me your story, Adela," he said, endeavouring to speak as lightly and unconcernedly as possible, "may I ask what the upshot of it all is going to be? Even if the facts really were as you have stated, I do not see what particular effect they could have upon the position of myself and my wife, or upon our mutual relations to each other. It would be very startling, no doubt, and not a little scandalous; but we should not have infringed the laws of consanguinity,—or any other law, for that matter,—and the objections which might be brought forward would be of a purely sentimental nature. But you would have to prove your story. What possible proof could you bring forward of your assertion that my relations with this lady—Mrs. Hungerford—Mrs. Ramsay, as you declare her real

name to be—had ever been otherwise than of a purely friendly character? You have no proofs. I absolutely deny it; and I may tell you at once that I am certain that your memory misleads you when you say that she herself gave you to understand differently. You must have heard that statement from somebody else. If you cannot prove this part of your story, the other part is of no importance whatever; for, even supposing that my wife and Mrs. Hungerford be half-sisters, what would that fact matter? Absolutely nothing at all,—as of course you must see for yourself."

Adela Wollaston listened with manifest impatience to Hugh's remarks; and, as he paused for a moment, broke in rather hurriedly.

"Look here, Heversham," she said, assuming her most frank and straightforward manner, "it's no use your trying to disprove my words. Take my advice, and don't lose valuable time by attempting to do so; and, above all, don't, for your own sake and for Muriel's, force me to prove them. The facts are as I said, and you know that at least one part of my

story is true, though, as I said before, you are perfectly right in not giving Mrs. Hungerford away, and I admire you for shielding her reputation. Don't, therefore, waste time with me over that part of the business, or think it necessary to keep up what we both know to be a polite fiction. I tell you that I have my proofs,—absolute proofs. The question is whether you want the matter to come to the ears of the world, or to be completely and definitely hushed up?"

Lord Heversham smiled again,—the same rather sarcastic smile which Adela did not quite know how to interpret. It made her uneasy, and she began to wonder whether she had not been too rash in making her assertions upon her personal convictions only, without holding more absolute evidence as to their truth.

"I do not see why the world should not hear your story, if you choose to tell it," he said carelessly. "Of course it would make a considerable sensation, —that I do not deny. But I still think that you

would find a difficulty in proving the most important point of it."

Adela Wollaston laughed scornfully; she was beginning to lose her temper.

"My dear Heversham," she exclaimed, "you are really delightful! You are like the proverbial ostrich, hiding your head in the sand. Do you imagine for a moment that there are not plenty of people in the world who know the terms which you and this Mrs. Hungerford were on? Let me remind you of one thing; namely, that servants have eyes, ears, and, unluckily, tongues, and that they make a very considerable use of all five!"

"Ah," said Hugh, drily, "you get your story from servants, do you? Not a very reliable source, I am afraid! And not one, I think, to which we have any business to go for information about our friends."

"I did not seek for the information," retorted Adela; "it was the result of a purely accidental meeting between George's valet, who was some years with you, before he came to us, and Mrs. Hunger-

ford. Of course the man, suddenly coming across Mrs. Hungerford staying in a foreign hotel under another name, talked—what could you expect? I had to warn my maid not to have anything to do with hers, and not to believe what she heard from George's servant."

Hugh burst out laughing. The thought of Marjory being supposed to exercise a contaminating influence over the George Wollastons' servants was amusing.

"A very wise precaution on your part," he said ironically, "as you had so strange an idea of the lady. But," he added, "I did not know that you were so careful of other people's morals! However, I am glad to learn from whom it is that you derive your information."

"Don't run away with that idea," replied Adela. "I should not rely on such a source as that. Frankly, if you wish the matter hushed up, it is in my power to insure that it shall be so."

"You are very kind! but I do not know that I

do wish it hushed up, for the reasons which I have given you."

Adela looked at him in amazement.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you do not wish it hushed up! Are you quite mad, Heversham? Do you realise what a terrible thing it would be for your wife? And in her state too! Surely, you do not want her to be talked of all her life as the half-sister of your ex-mistress? Besides, you know the world; people will say that the latter is your mistress still, and will declare that Muriel knew of it when she married you, and that it was a thing agreed upon between you all. Muriel is so much younger than her stepsister, and so beautiful—"

"Go on," said Hugh, tersely. He was marvelling at the depravity of this woman's mind.

"And Violet, too!" continued Mrs. Wollaston—"what a false position for her to be placed in! She is engaged to be married, and do you think that the marriage will come off if it becomes known that she is the stepsister of a divorced woman who has been

her brother-in-law's mistress,—the sister of a woman who could marry a man—"

"That is enough!" said Hugh, very coldly. "Your imagination is very vivid. I agree with you," he added, fearing lest he had thrown too much scorn into his voice, and that Adela would not finally commit herself to showing her motive.

"I am glad you do," replied Adela. "Believe me, I only wish to save you from the trouble and annoyance of such a scandal becoming known. For Muriel's sake, and for Violet's, you must suppress it once for all."

"And you have it in your power to do that, you say?"

"With your assistance—yes."

"And that assistance is—?"

"Money."

"Ah—I must pay hush-money; but to whom?—to you?"

"Listen, Heversham," replied Adela, speaking low and very rapidly. "I can stop this thing from becoming known—yes, but I must have money to

work with. There are others to be silenced besides myself. You are a rich man, and it will be nothing to you. I will put the matter before you frankly. Give me the cheque I ask for,—or rather give me its equivalent in notes,—and I will engage that you shall never be troubled again by this business—neither you nor Muriel, in any way."

"And if I do not give you the money?"

Mrs. George Wollaston looked at Hugh steadily. She thought she detected signs of uneasiness and alarm in him, for he put the question in a doubtful and hesitating manner.

"If you do not give me the money," she replied, "I shall not feel it necessary to hold my tongue about this matter. Lady Heversham will have to learn that society does not receive very cordially women who marry under such circumstances. Your sister-in-law's engagement will be broken off—and you—well, I do not think that your position will be a very enviable one, or your son's, if you have one, after you. The world will not forget so disagreeable a story for some time."

Lord Heversham sat with his face buried in his hands for some moments, so that Adela was unable to see the effect of her words. At length he rose from his chair.

"What do you want?" he asked hoarsely.

A little thrill of excitement and triumph passed through Adela's veins.

"Five thousand pounds," she replied, fixing her eyes upon him.

"Five thousand pounds! It is a great deal of money."

"It is not too much money to give to save your family name from scandal, and your wife from a shock which might cost her her life. You are rich—the money should be nothing to you."

"And if I gave you this sum of money, you are prepared to swear that this story shall remain for ever unknown and unsuspected by the world?"

"So far as I and the persons from whom I have learned it are concerned, yes," answered Adela, "I swear it, on my honour!"

"On your honour!" said Hugh; "that is not ne-

cessary. A lady's honour is supposed to be unquestionable."

"Of course," continued Adela, "you must deal with Mrs. Hungerford for yourself. I cannot be answerable for what her action may be. My promise is binding only upon myself, and upon—I may tell you candidly now—one other person for whose silence I can answer, provided that you supply me with the sum of money I name."

"So that the five thousand pounds is to be divided between you and that other person?"

Mrs. Wollaston moved her hands nervously, and for the first time she took her eyes off Hugh's face. Then she laughed,—a forced, uncomfortable little laugh. "You can look upon it as a little present you have made me for my trouble, should there be anything remaining of the five thousand when I have settled the business," she said.

"Very well," answered Lord Heversham; "let us call it a present; it sounds better than the other name. That has a savour of the police-courts about it, and of the Old Bailey. I think that we now

understand each other. It is a terrible situation, as you say, and the affair must be hushed up, for every reason. What does George know of this?" he added abruptly.

"Nothing," said Adela, "absolutely nothing! For Heaven's sake don't say anything at all to him about it. The fewer people who know of it the better, and the easier it will be to arrange."

"I see," answered Hugh. "I am glad that I asked you, as otherwise I should have thought he was in the—in the secret," he added, correcting himself quickly. "Now the only thing that remains to be done is to settle the details of our bargain. I have a proposal to make to you. So large a sum of money, you know of course, cannot be got at a moment's notice, and you would not wish to present a cheque bearing my signature for such an amount. In a week from now I will meet you in London, and pay over the money to you. I suppose that you can prevail upon your informant not to open his or her mouth about this for a week."

"Yes," said Adela, "I can promise that—but not for more than a week."

"It will not be necessary; I cannot come to town before, because to-morrow our own shoot begins at Heversham,—at least, the people come to-morrow, and we shoot the next four days. This day week, if you can be in Carlton House Terrace at twelve o'clock, the money shall be handed over to you, and I shall expect a written and signed promise from you that a story to the effect that—I need not go over the details again—is absolutely false, so far as my having had any improper relations with the lady calling herself Mrs. Hungerford—White—or Ramsay is concerned. Of course, should anything come to my knowledge to prove to me that you have been deceived in supposing Mrs. Hungerford to have been a daughter of Colonel Goring, we need say no more about the matter. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes," said Adela, after a moment's hesitation, "I agree. I will meet you at your house in London at twelve o'clock this day week."

"That is settled then," said Lord Heversham. "I shall not fail you. Now," he continued, "had we not better return and show ourselves to the rest of the party? We have been shut up together here for a long time!"

He followed Adela Wollaston back to the drawing-room where they had left their hostess, and found her still deep in the game of Bridge.

Lord Heversham just looked into the room, and seeing that all the party were busy gambling, betook himself to the smoking-room, there to think over what he had just heard. He was convinced that Adela Wollaston was trying to blackmail him; but he was also convinced that she had in some way or another learned the truth concerning his *liaison* with Marjory. That the latter and his wife were step-sisters he could not believe possible,—but yet Adela Wollaston had seemed so positive of her facts that he could not but feel a terrible uneasiness that here, too, she might be correct. He remembered questioning Mrs. Goring about her husband's first wife, and she had told him that there had been one daughter

only by that marriage, and that daughter, she had given him to understand, had died some years before. This had been when he had just become engaged to Muriel, and afterwards he had heard from his wife that she could recollect her stepsister very well; that she had married; and that then something dreadful happened, but what it was Muriel declared she never knew, though when she grew older she had guessed. Her mother, she had told him, had forbidden her and Violet ever to mention their stepsister's name, and then some time afterwards she had told them that she was dead in India. Muriel had cried very much, and had been punished for doing so, and her mother had been very angry with her,—that she remembered perfectly well. Hugh recollected that he had never asked his wife what his stepsister's name had been, nor whom she had married. He determined to do so directly he returned to Heversham, for he would at all events learn from her answer if Adela had been right in the history she had given him of Colonel Maitland-Goring's only child by his first marriage. Violet Goring was so much younger

that she would probably know little or nothing about it—indeed Muriel had told him that the latter could not recollect her stepsister.

Hugh began turning over in his mind whether there were not some friend to whom he could apply for assistance and advice in the very difficult position in which he found himself. He disliked the idea of dealing single-handed with Mrs. George Wollaston, especially where there might be a question of a large sum of money passing from him into her hands. He would not trust to Adela Wollaston's word, for she might keep to her share of the bargain by not spreading the story, but circulate some other report to account for having received so large a sum from him. Five thousand pounds would not last her very long, and he altogether dismissed from his mind as mythical the person who was to share the money with her. Every penny of it would go into her own pocket; of that he did not entertain the slightest doubt.

Suddenly he paused in his attempts to think of a man upon whose judgment and discretion he could rely.

"Charlie!" he exclaimed to himself, "Charlie Fortescue, of course! What an idiot I was not to think of him at once! The very man! He has pulled fellows out of worse holes than this in his time. I will get him down to Heversham, and we will talk the thing over. He will like the job of checkmating Adela Wollaston, if it is possible to do so."

He went to the writing-table and wrote upon a telegram form the following message:—

"To Charles Fortescue, Albany, London,—Can you come to Heversham at once—have to consult you on urgent business. If you cannot come, wire to Heversham when and where I can see you as soon as possible.

"HUGH."

Ringing the bell, he gave the message to the footman who answered it.

"Will you please see that this telegram is sent off to-morrow morning as soon as the office opens? It is important," he said. "I think," he added to himself as the man left the room, "that if there is a way out of this business Charlie will find it. As for

Adela Wollaston—a new word is wanted in the English language to describe the type."

And so saying he returned once more to the card-players in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VII.

It so happened that Mr. Fortescue was in London when Hugh's telegram reached him. Since his interview with Marjory he had been daily expecting to hear something from Lord Heversham, or to receive a visit from him, for he did not believe for a moment that Adela Wollaston would not attempt to make mischief out of what she must undoubtedly have found out about Mrs. Hungerford. That several weeks should have gone by without her having made any apparent move was only natural, and Mr. Fortescue thought that she was probably only waiting a fitting opportunity to go to Hugh with her story, or perhaps to tell it to Muriel, which would be worse. From all that Marjory had related to him he felt tolerably certain that Mrs. Wollaston must have strong suspicions that the former Lord Heversham were at anyrate well known

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other, and a very little reflection on Adela's part would, he thought, cause her to put two and two together and suspect that there was some connection between them, and that suspicion would lead her dangerously near to the discovery of the truth.

What Mr. Fortescue did not tell Marjory, in any one of the subsequent interviews which he had with her in her hotel, was that he feared that Adela would strive to make mischief between Hugh and Muriel by talking about her to the latter, or even perhaps by attempting in some way to bring about a meeting between Hugh and her with a view to the re-establishment of their former relations with each other.

Hugh's telegram, therefore, caused him no surprise, for he had been expecting to hear from him, and he thought that he could guess what it was upon which he wished to consult him.

The news which had recently reached Mr. Fortescue of Muriel's approaching confinement made him think it more probable that Adela was threaten-

ing to tell her about Mrs. Hungerford or had perhaps already told her, and that Hugh wished for some testimony, from a person whom he knew his wife would believe, which should disabuse her mind from the effects of Mrs. Wollaston's mischievous stories or accusations. He, Charlie Fortescue, was glad that it should fall to him to be the one to stand between Muriel Heversham and Mrs. Wollaston's attempts to injure her, and he telegraphed immediately to Hugh, saying that he would leave London the following morning and be at Heversham in time for dinner. He had not seen Lady Heversham since the summer, and, when he arrived at the house and she received him, he was struck by a certain difference in her. She was not only lovelier than ever, but also brighter and more animated. In London he had often noticed with regret that she looked anxious and unhappy. People said that she was cold and indifferent, and bored, but Mr. Fortescue had known that she was none of these things. Now, however, he found her cheerful and happy, surrounded by a number of guests, for

the shooting-party had assembled the day before, and what between sportsmen and non-sportsmen the house was full.

"This is really a pleasant surprise!" Lady Heversham said to him cordially as she gave him some tea. "Hugh only told me yesterday that you were coming to us,—on business, he says,—but you must not let the business interfere with pleasure; and now that we have got you here we shall not let you go away till the end of the week, so you must resign yourself to your fate."

"I assure you that I am delighted to come, Lady Heversham," Mr. Fortescue answered. "I wish all business implied a pleasant visit to one's friends."

"Evidently," he continued to himself, "nothing has been said to her—she looks a different being. What can have happened to make her so much happier and more like what she must be by nature?"

And then he looked at her again as she moved

away from the tea-table and remembered what he had heard about her.

"Ah!" he thought, "of course—that may account for a good deal."

At this moment Lord Heversham came into the room. "How are you, Charlie?" he said, shaking hands with him. "It is very good of you to have come down so quickly. I will explain why I wanted to see you so much," he added in a lower tone. "We will have a talk in my room after dinner,—but don't say anything to Muriel about it; I don't want her to be worried." He looked across at his wife as he spoke, and Mr. Fortescue, following his glance, saw that it rested upon her affectionately. There was even something of anxiety in it,—certainly none of the indifference with which he used to look at her.

After dinner Mr. Fortescue accompanied Lord Heversham to the latter's own sitting-room, where he transacted all his business. The rest of the party were in the drawing-rooms, which were quite

at the other side of the house, and here they were sure of having an uninterrupted hour.

"Now tell me, Hugh, what is it all about?" said Mr. Fortescue, as he lighted a cigar and sat himself down in an armchair by the fire, in which large logs and blocks of peat were blazing.

"It is a long story," replied Lord Heversham. "I am in a hole, and I want your advice as to how I shall best get out of it."

"Life is full of holes," remarked Mr. Fortescue. "Is this a deep one?"

"That is just what I don't quite know. I'm afraid that it's fairly rotten at the sides, however."

"Those are bad to get out of," replied Mr. Fortescue; "but we shall see if there is not some firm ground to lay hold of. May I ask you one question?"

"Of course?"

"Who besides yourself is at the bottom of this hole? There is always somebody else. Generally it is a woman."

Hugh smiled. "There are three," he answered, "and they are all women."

"But one of them is the cause of the rest being there," said Mr. Fortescue. "Unless I am much mistaken," he added, "Mrs. George Wollaston is the person who has, or means to, put you into it."

"Yes," replied Hugh, looking at him in astonishment; "but how did you know? Oh, I see!" he continued bitterly. "I suppose that she has been already talking, and that the story is all over the place by this time. Next week we shall read mysterious hints of it in the society papers. Who told you of it?"

"A lady to whom you once introduced me,—Mrs. Hungerford," answered Mr. Fortescue quietly.

"Mrs. Hungerford? Marjory?" exclaimed Hugh. "Charlie!" he added, "do you know that if anybody else but you had told me that I should not have believed him,—and I should have told him so. Good God! then Adela was telling the truth, and Marjory did tell her! I cannot believe it!" he burst

out suddenly. "Marjory would never have spread the story, even if she had known it—she would never have talked of the years which preceded my marriage—"

Mr. Fortescue checked him before he could say more.

"Stay!" he said; "perhaps what Mrs. Wollaston told you is not quite the same story which Mrs. Hungerford told me. It is very possible, I think, that we shall find upon examination that they differ. It will simplify matters if you will tell me what it is that Mrs. Wollaston told you. I will then tell you what I heard from Mrs. Hungerford."

Hugh recounted to him all that had passed between Adela and himself two days before, and Mr. Fortescue listened attentively. As he heard how Mrs. Wollaston had related all the details of Marjory's married life he made one or two little exclamations of astonishment. He knew that Marjory had never spoken of these things, and he could not conceive how Adela should have come to know of

them. But when he heard that she had told Hugh who Marjory had been before her marriage, and that she evidently knew even such particulars as that her stepmother had been violently jealous of her and had hurried on her marriage with a good-for-nothing scoundrel merely to get her away from home, his face became very grave. It was word for word the same story which he had heard from Marjory's lips. The two women might almost be acting in concert; but he knew that such a thing could not be.

Then Hugh told him how Mrs. Wollaston had declared that she possessed positive evidence to prove that Marjory Hungerford and Marjory Maitland were one and the same person, and therefore that she and Hugh's wife were stepsisters.

"And what did Mrs. Wollaston propose that you should do?" he asked, after he had listened to the end.

"She proposed that I should give her five thousand pounds to keep the matter secret," said Hugh, drily.

"And you agreed to do so?"

"Yes,—under certain reservations. I did not believe her story; I do not believe it now, but I let her think that I did. I wished to see how far she would go,—to what baseness she would descend."

Mr. Fortescue rose from his chair with an alacrity which many younger men would have envied, and began pacing up and down the room, rubbing his hands together in enjoyment. "That is capital," he ejaculated at intervals. "I suspected as much—that makes seven thousand."

"I don't understand you!" said Hugh, a little angrily. "What is capital? and what on earth do you mean by seven thousand?"

"You will know very soon, my dear fellow," answered Mr. Fortescue; "but now," he added more seriously, "let us stick to the business in hand. You say that you do not believe Mrs. Wollaston's story?"

"Only so far as it concerns Marjory Hungerford's former relations with myself. I have no doubt

that Adela did meet her, and did identify her through that servant of mine who is now George's valet. The rest of the story I believe to be the mere clumsy attempt of a desperate woman to extort money. It is preposterous,—there cannot be a word of truth in it!"

There was an uneasiness and an anxiety in Hugh's accents which showed very plainly that he was not so certain of the impossibility of Adela's assertion as his words implied. Mr. Fortescue looked at him keenly for a moment before he replied.

"It is an attempt to extort money from you——yes," he said after a slight pause; "but, my dear Hugh, Mrs. Wollaston's story is neither preposterous nor impossible. It is absolutely true."

Hugh looked at him in silence, unable to utter a single syllable.

"It is absolutely true," Mr. Fortescue repeated. "How true I suspect that Mrs. Wollaston herself does not know. I feel very sure that she could not prove her statement. In declaring to you that

she could do so I am nearly certain that she lied."

"It is true!" exclaimed Hugh. "You tell me that it is true,—that Muriel and Marjory Hungerford are stepsisters! But how do you know? Did Marjory tell you so?"

"Yes."

"Then she must also have told Adela Wollaston, and so Adela was speaking the truth when she said that she had her proofs!"

"Not at all. Mrs. Hungerford told me so because she feared that Mrs. George might have guessed something of the truth. She certainly did not tell Mrs. Wollaston so. She never said more to her about you than that she had once known you, and she never said that she had known your wife at all or even knew whom you had married." Hugh threw himself into a chair with a groan.

"I cannot make head or tail of it," he exclaimed angrily. "All I know is that that infernal woman has got hold of a story which will make

Muriel miserable for life if it should ever come to her ears. I thought you might have helped me to find some way out of the difficulty, for, upon my soul, I believed it to be either some lie which could be easily refuted, or some extraordinary mistake which a little simple investigation would set straight. I asked Muriel yesterday about her stepsister. I knew that she had had one, who, so Mrs. Goring told me, died some years ago, but I did not remember her name, if, indeed, I had ever heard it."

"And what did Lady Heversham tell you?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Very little. She did not know much. But she did tell me her name—and it was Marjory. She married a Captain Ramsay in some cavalry regiment, and Muriel thinks she is dead. She suspects that there was some scandal, but as her mother would not hear Mrs. Ramsay's name mentioned, and Muriel was a child at the time, she could not tell me more."

"Mrs. Wollaston, however, had told you as much."

"Yes, that is what makes me so anxious. If one half of that woman's story is true, the other half may be equally so. You tell me that it is,—and I know that you would not say so unless you knew it for a fact. If it is true, it is true, and there is no more to be said about it, except that Muriel and I are the victims of about as cruel a piece of bad luck as Fate ever designed."

"And Mrs. Hungerford, as I will still call her, she also is to be pitied,—more, perhaps, than either of you. Mrs. Wollaston appears to have tried to make you believe that Mrs. Hungerford was the person from whom she learned this story upon the strength of which she is now trying to get money out of you. Well, that is a half-truth, and, like all half-truths, it is more dangerous and more misleading than a lie. Mrs. Wollaston did learn a great deal from her—but it was not from words that she learnt it, or from letters. When she heard—I presume from her maid—who was with the valet

when the latter unluckily recognised Mrs. Hungerford,—that the latter was the lady whose house you had frequented for years, she contrived to get into conversation with her, and in the course of it she played upon her feelings by inventing a malicious tale concerning your wife's infidelity to you and your own unhappiness in consequence. She represented you as a man whose life was wrecked by an unhappy and ill-assorted marriage. Mrs. Hungerford, unfortunately, but very naturally, could not hide her agitation, and the other drew her conclusions from it. Indignation against Lady Heversham for her supposed treatment of you made Mrs. Hungerford ask who she had been before you married her, for, though she knew you had married she had never heard who your wife was, and had shrunk from trying to ascertain. You can imagine her horror and dismay at being told that she was no other than her own half-sister, her father's daughter. Her emotion at hearing this quite overpowered her, and I have not the slightest doubt that Mrs. Wollaston gathered from it that there

must be some close connection between the two."

"How do you know all this?" asked Lord Hevershame, wonderingly.

"As I told you—from Mrs. Hungerford herself. You recollect that she had known me in the old days, when you took me to see her at Highgate, and she knew that I was an old and trusted friend of yours and of all your family. She came to see me. I am ashamed to say that at first I suspected her motives. I thought that it was one of those cases of a woman turning up again to make mischief and demand money. We have all of us known instances of that kind. Well, when I had heard Mrs. Hungerford's story and what her motive was for coming to me with it, I was obliged to apologise to her very humbly for having wronged her. I have not forgiven myself yet for having done so. That is the worst of living in the world,—it makes it so difficult for us to recognise a generous or disinterested action when we come across one."

"And what was her motive?" asked Hugh.

"I think you need hardly ask. It was the same motive as that which led her to separate from you so entirely. That woman has been, and is, deeply and devotedly attached to you, and she has consistently sacrificed herself to what she believed to be your happiness and advantage. You yourself told me why she had left you—and I did not believe it—I never did believe it until very recently. Her motive for coming to me was this. She felt convinced that Mrs. Wollaston had discovered her identity as your mistress, and she was in an agony lest she might unconsciously have led her to suspect her identity also with your wife's unfortunate stepsister. Added to this was her grief at learning that your marriage had turned out miserably, and that her own stepsister should be the cause of your unhappiness."

"And that she-devil depicted Muriel to her—"

"In the worst colours!" interrupted Mr. Fortescue, angrily. "She assured her that Lady Heversham had merely married you for your position and

your money; that she was utterly indifferent to you, and much worse than that. She as good as said that she was notoriously unfaithful to you, and that at any moment a great scandal might be the result. Before she heard who Lady Heversham had been, Mrs. Hungerford was furious. She would have offered to go back to you in order to bring some happiness into your life, feeling that she was in no way bound to continue her self-sacrifice for the sake of an unfaithful and mercenary wife. I firmly believe that this was exactly what Mrs. Wollaston wished her to do, and that she had calculated the effect which her wicked insinuations concerning Lady Heversham would have upon her. Mrs. Wollaston hates your wife,—she has never lost an opportunity of giving her a bad word. It is a malicious, reasonless hatred,—the hatred that a bad nature conceives towards a good one. She wished your former mistress to come between yourself and your wife; for she guessed that the latter is deeply attached to you; she believed that you did not return her affection, but that all the love you had to give was still

Marjory Hungerford's, and had never ceased to be hers alone."

"Why should she have thought that?" said Hugh, uneasily; "what could lead her to suppose that I did not care for my wife but only for Mrs. Hungerford?"

Mr. Fortescue paused for a moment. "My dear Hugh," he replied at length, "you have asked me for my advice in a very difficult and delicate matter, so you must not mind what I say, or think that I am taking upon myself to interfere in what is no affair of mine. Mrs. George Wollaston only supposes what the whole world supposes and openly says. Nobody believes that you married Lady Heversham because you cared for her, but only because circumstances compelled you to marry somebody, and she happened to appear to you as more suitable to be your wife than other women. Everybody knew that for years you had had some *liaison* with a lady, but nobody quite knew who the lady was, and the very few who did, like myself, did not talk about it. Your own demeanour towards Lady

Heversham certainly was not calculated to alter the world's opinion,—you see that I am perfectly frank with you. I have no doubt that had it not been for Lady Heversham's absolute loyalty to you, and the quiet and dignified manner in which she has borne herself as your wife, the world would have said that she did not care for you and had married you to be Lady Heversham. But the world has never been able to say that; on the contrary, it has admired her, and pitied her. You must recollect that she is a very beautiful woman, and if she had not steered her course very carefully there would have been plenty of people angry with her for not being as themselves, and jealous of her beauty,—people like Mrs. George, for instance, ready and eager to tear her reputation into shreds."

Hugh was silent. He would not resent Mr. Fortescue's words, and he was bitterly conscious of their truth.

After a pause, during which both men looked thoughtfully into the fire and puffed at their cigars, Lord Heversham said:—

"You are quite right, Charlie, it's plain speaking, but I can't deny it. I've been rather a brute to Muriel; but I'm beginning to see it now—when it's too late, probably! And Marjory, too—"

"You have come across two women with similar natures," said Mr. Fortescue. "Lady Heversham's character and Mrs. Hungerford's have, I think, a great deal in common. Perhaps it is very natural that it should be so."

"The pity of it is that both should have been wasted on one man!" said Hugh, bitterly. "But why," he added, "should Adela Wollaston have been so sure that I still cared for Marjory Hungerford? That must have been a pure supposition on her part, surely!"

"Not entirely," replied Mr. Fortescue. "I will tell you why she thought so. Do you remember when we had that upset coming back from Moor Hall? You were thrown off the box and stunned."

"Perfectly; but what has that to do with it?"

"You came to when Lady Heversham was supporting your head and bathing your face,—we were

all standing round you—Mrs. Wollaston among the rest."

"Well?"

"As you came to yourself, you spoke the name 'Marjory;' evidently you were under the impression that it was she who was with you, not your wife."

Hugh started and looked at Mr. Fortescue inquiringly.

"Did Muriel hear?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied Mr. Fortescue; "and so," he added, "did Mrs. Wollaston."

"I understand. What I do not understand, however, is how Adela Wollaston came to discover Marjory's real name, and her history. She was absolutely correct in all she told me regarding her married life and its unhappy termination. She told me, also, what even I had never known,—the one thing which Marjory, from pride, or shame, or both —had made me promise never to ask her. How did Adela come by this information?"

"There," replied Mr. Fortescue, "I am at fault.

I do not know, and I cannot guess how she knows it. I am not even sure that she does know it for a fact. Women always jump at conclusions, and sometimes the conclusions happen to be correct. Is there anybody of whom you can think who knew Mrs. Hungerford in the days before she met you whom Mrs. Wollaston may have come across? The servant, James, knew nothing about her, I conclude?"

"Nothing," answered Hugh; "it is quite impossible that he should have done so. Neither," he added, "can I think of anybody who could have told Adela Wollaston. You see, since her misfortunes in India and the cruel way in which her own belongings treated her, Marjory had, one may say, completely disappeared from the world? Of course you know her name in the literary world. She will have told you that. I have reason to know that not even her publishers knew of her identity. Her one aim in life was to keep herself unknown. It was a morbid feeling, I think; but she regarded herself as an outcast from society,—a woman who

had irretrievably lost her reputation, and with it her claim to the sympathy of her fellow-creatures."

"Morbid!" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, "I should think that it was morbid! Why, that woman is worth a hundred of your respectable members of society who do not know what temptation is and complacently damn their fellow-creatures who succumb to it. But I have not told you what Mrs. Hungerford's principal motive for coming to me was. When she knew who your wife was, her indignation against her vanished. Her one anxiety was as to how she could bring about a happier state of things between you and Lady Heversham than that which Mrs. Wollaston had made her believe existed. She could not believe that her stepsister whom she had known and loved as a child could have changed into the heartless, worldly woman Mrs. Wollaston depicted her. It was this, I believe, that made her mistrust her informant. Mrs. George had coloured her picture too highly. As a matter of fact, the one being in the world besides yourself whom Marjory

Hungerford had loved was her stepsister Muriel. She was nothing but a memory perhaps, but nevertheless she was the one happy memory of a most unhappy home. Mrs. Hungerford came to me to implore me to help her in preventing the truth from ever coming to your wife's ears, and to tell her if there were no means of making her return to her duty and loyalty to you—her husband. Can you wonder that I asked her to forgive me for my doubts and suspicions concerning her motives?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Hugh; "but it is what I should have expected of her. It was, as you say, the consistent carrying out of the sacrifice she made when she would not allow me to marry her and left me. But you could open her eyes to Adela's calumnies about Muriel?" he added.

"Fortunately, yes. It was the first ray of happiness and relief which had come to her. After hearing how cruelly Mrs. Wollaston had deceived her she became more than ever anxious to shield both you and your wife from injury. I have seen

her several times since, for she is in London, and her one object is to keep this story from ever becoming known to Lady Heversham."

"It seems to me that there is only one way to do that," said Hugh.

"And that is?"

"To pay Adela Wollaston her hush-money."

"Never!" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, emphatically; "that would be tantamount to admitting the truth of the story, which you must never do."

"But if it is true?"

Mr. Fortescue smiled. "There are many truths which are not admissible," he replied. "We must make Mrs. Wollaston show us her proofs; then we shall know from what quarter she has derived her information. When have you promised to meet her?" he continued.

"On Saturday; she is to come to Carlton House Terrace."

"Then you must allow me to assist at the interview," said Mr. Fortescue. "It will be as well that you should have a witness."

"That is what I wished to ask you, Charlie; you know what sort of a woman Adela Wollaston is supposed to be. For Muriel's sake, I should not care to pay over to her so large a sum of money without having somebody who could disprove any assertions which she might make hereafter as to why she had received it."

"I will be your witness," said Mr. Fortescue; "but, unless I am very much mistaken, no money will change hands, and Mrs. George Wollaston, whatever she may fancy that she has discovered, will come to the conclusion that it will be more to her advantage to hold her tongue."

"So you think that you see a way out of this hole?" said Hugh.

"Yes," answered Mr. Fortescue. "I think I see a way out. It is not a pleasant way, but it must serve; and, after all, we are not dealing with a very pleasant person. On Saturday, then, I will meet you at your house in London. At what hour is your appointment with this lady?"

"At twelve o'clock."

"I fancy that she will be punctual. I have been making some inquiries about the George Wollastons lately. From what I hear I imagine that they are about on their last legs. Five thousand pounds would certainly be very useful at this moment,—but I do not think that they will get it. A passage across the Channel does not cost much, and Dinard, they tell me, is a place where smart people like the Wollastons would be sure to find friends. Now, Hugh," Mr. Fortescue added, "let us go back to your guests, and do not let Lady Heversham see that you are worried."

"I wish I knew what you mean to do," said Hugh, as he followed him to the door.

"Not much!" answered Mr. Fortescue, "only I am afraid that Mrs. George Wollaston will oblige me to recall to her memory something which she appears to have forgotten."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN the day appointed for the interview between Mrs. George Wollaston and Lord Heversham came, twelve o'clock found the latter and Mr. Fortescue awaiting her arrival in Carlton House Terrace. The servant had been told that Lord Heversham expected Mrs. Wollaston that morning, and that when she came she was to be shown in to him immediately. They had not long to wait, for the clock had barely ceased striking the hour when the door opened and Adela was announced.

She started a little when she saw Mr. Fortescue. She barely nodded to him, and said to Hugh: "I understood, of course, that our interview this morning was to be strictly private. We can delay talking over our business until Mr. Fortescue has concluded his visit to you."

"Mr. Fortescue," replied Hugh, "is here at my

invitation. As I have not the slightest objection to his hearing what you have to say, I presume that you can have none either."

"I have nothing more to add to what I said to you when we last met," answered Adela a little insolently, "and nothing to retract. You know what I am here for. Perhaps Mr. Fortescue will rejoin us when we have finished our business," she added, turning to the latter with ill-concealed annoyance.

"No, Adela, Mr. Fortescue will remain here, if you please," interposed Hugh, quietly. "Our business, as you call it, will either be settled in his presence or it will not be settled at all."

Adela Wollaston was visibly disconcerted. "Oh, very well!" she replied, shrugging her shoulders with an air of indifference, "if you like a third person to hear of the very disagreeable position you and your wife are in, it is nothing to me. I thought that the object of our meeting was to insure secrecy upon a certain point. Pray am I to understand that

you have told Mr. Fortescue the reason for my being here?"

"You are."

"You are very confiding! Then you, I suppose," Adela continued, addressing Mr. Fortescue, "quite realise what a very unpleasant position Lord Heversham is in. To get him out of it without a scandal, and without the whole of this very repulsive story coming to light, money is necessary. There are others besides myself, you understand, who know the truth, and their mouths must be shut."

"I quite understand, Mrs. Wollaston," said Mr. Fortescue, drily. "Lord Heversham is very fortunate in having secured so experienced a person as yourself to act for him."

"What do you mean?" asked Adela, sharply.

Mr. Fortescue made a little bow. "My dear Mrs. Wollaston," he replied, "I mean exactly what I say. But now, if you please, before you and Hugh conclude your little bargain together,—it sounds better to call it a bargain, does it not?—I should like to ask you a few questions."

"I decline to answer any questions from you," exclaimed Adela, rudely; "it is no business of yours, and you have no right to interfere."

"Pardon me! Mr. Fortescue has every right to interfere," interrupted Hugh. "I have placed this matter unreservedly in his hands."

"You have gone back from your word," said Adela, turning angrily upon him. "You promised that you would to-day pay over to me the sum of money I named without further conditions."

"I think," said Lord Heversham, "that I made a proviso that I would do so should nothing transpire to make me believe that you were—mistaken in your story."

"Well?" retorted Adela, "what of that? Nothing has transpired, because there is nothing that can transpire except the truth, and you certainly do not wish that!"

Mr. Fortescue intervened at this moment.

"Mrs. Wollaston," he said, "you must forgive me, but the situation is briefly this: Lord Heversham, it

appears, promised to give you a certain sum of money."

"Five thousand pounds," interrupted Adela.

"Five thousand pounds, exactly so! on condition of your engaging to keep silence upon a certain discovery which you declare to him you have made. He tells me, however, that he accompanied his promise with a stipulation that you should prove to him the truth of your alleged discovery before he paid over to you the money. Will you be so good as to furnish us—I say us, for in this matter, as Lord Heversham has told you, he and I act together —with your proofs?"

"With my proofs?" repeated Adela, scornfully. "I have already furnished them to Lord Heversham. He thought them strong enough to justify him in accepting my offer to hush the matter up for him."

Mr. Fortescue looked at her steadily. "I will be a little more explicit," he continued quietly. "What we—Lord Heversham and I—desire to know is how you can prove, firstly, that Mrs. Hungerford, the lady

you assert to be Lady Heversham's half-sister, and Lord Heversham were ever on any more than merely friendly terms with each other, and, secondly, on what grounds you base your assertion that Mrs. Hungerford and Miss Maitland, who subsequently became Mrs. Ramsay, are one and the same person."

"The first is proved by the testimony of a man who was once your servant and is now my husband's," answered Adela, looking at Hugh.

"Ah—on the evidence of a manservant! That is hardly a proof, Mrs. Wollaston," said Mr. Fortescue, suavely; "you surely have something more to go upon than that?"

"Certainly I have," replied Adela, doggedly.

"May we ask what it is?"

"The evidence of Mrs. Hungerford herself!"

"Oh, you know Mrs. Hungerford?"

"Yes, I met her abroad."

"And she told you that she had been Lord Heversham's mistress? A curious admission to make

to a comparative stranger, was it not?—or to anybody, for that matter!"

"Those women have not the same ideas upon certain subjects as we have."

"That is quite true, Mrs. Wollaston," said Mr. Fortescue, gravely; "women who—well, who sell themselves—must of course have very different ideas of delicacy and refinement from those of the women of our class. Mrs. Hungerford, I suppose, was angry for some reason with Lord Heversham,—considered herself ill-used, perhaps?"

"I believe so; she spoke as if she did."

"So we are to understand that from Mrs. Hungerford herself you have the proofs that she was Lord Heversham's mistress?"

"Yes; for many years."

Hugh started forward and was about to speak, but Mr. Fortescue threw him a warning glance and he kept silence.

"And now," continued Mr. Fortescue, "as to the second assertion that Mrs. Hungerford is really Mrs. Ramsay,—*née* Maitland,—and, therefore, half-sister

to Lady Heversham,—did you get this information also from Mrs. Hungerford?"

Adela Wollaston hesitated. "Not altogether," she said. "Something that Mrs. Hungerford let fall in a moment of excitement and agitation at hearing who Muriel had been before her marriage caused me to suspect it. My suspicions were confirmed by another person who knows Mrs. Hungerford, and who knew her in India in her married days. That is the person whose silence must be bought. I absolutely refuse to mention the name."

"And," said Mr. Fortescue, shortly and decidedly —"until you tell us the name, and produce that person in the flesh, Lord Heversham absolutely refuses to pay you the money you require. Your proofs are not sufficient,—they are, as I shall presently show you, no proofs at all."

Adela Wollaston sprang up from her chair. "Oh!" she exclaimed furiously. "I have no proofs at all? And you will not allow Heversham to pay over the money until I produce the individual who told me of Mrs. Hungerford's identity? Well, I will

never give up that person's name, and if, when I leave this house, I have not the money which was promised to me, the whole of London shall know that the beautiful Lady Heversham, who has been so immaculate in her conduct, and who has thought other people not fit for her to associate with, has not been above marrying the man with whom her stepsister lived for years as his mistress. The world will say that the Gorings were determined not to let you go out of the family!" she added, turning to Hugh with a scornful laugh.

Mr. Fortescue laid a warning hand on Hugh's arm. "So, Mrs. Wollaston," he said calmly, when Adela paused,—she was now trembling with excitement and barely repressed rage,—"the position is this: You will not bring forward your witness, and yet you demand a sum of five thousand pounds from Lord Heversham, threatening, unless you receive it, to tell this story. Well, you will not receive it for several reasons. When you have heard all those reasons, you will not even ask for it any more. I will begin by giving you some of them. In the

first place, your story is untrue. Mrs. Hungerford never said one word to you which could lead you to suppose that she and Lord Heversham had been on the terms you pretend. Lord Heversham denies it, and Mrs. Hungerford would deny it also. I defy you to produce any proofs that they were ever more to each other than old and intimate friends."

Adela Wollaston laughed insolently. "I tell you," she retorted, "that I have Mrs. Hungerford's authority for what I say."

"That," said Mr. Fortescue, "is a statement which you will be sorry that you have insisted upon. It shows your absolute ignorance of the character of that lady that you should suppose her to be capable of playing the part of a disappointed *demi-mondaine.* You met Mrs. Hungerford abroad at an inn at Riva, I believe,—a little place in the Austrian Tyrol, is it not? Your husband's servant recognised her as Mrs. Hungerford and she also recognised and spoke to him. You learned from him that Lord Heversham had been a very constant visitor at her house

for some years, and because you were aware that rumour had credited him with keeping a mistress before his marriage, you jumped at the conclusion that she was that person. You thought this the more probable because you believed that Mrs. Hungerford was staying at the inn under an assumed name."

"She was!" exclaimed Adela; "she called herself Mrs. White. It was the servant—James—who knew her real name."

Mr. Fortescue smiled. "Do you know who Mrs. Hungerford is?" he asked.

"Who she is? I do not know what you mean. I have told you already. She is Mrs. Ramsay,—or rather she has scarcely even the right to call herself that. I cannot tell how many names she may not have passed under. Women like her have a good many, I believe. At anyrate, she was calling herself Mrs. White at Riva."

"She had every right to do so, if she chose," said Mr. Fortescue. "Did you ever hear of Cecil White, may I ask?"

"Of course! the novelist. But what has that to do with it?"

"Nothing particular! only you are so anxious to acquire information about Mrs. Hungerford that it may interest you to know that she writes under that name."

"Charlie!" remonstrated Hugh, "what have you done? We have no business to let Mrs. Hungerford's secret out in this way."

"It is all right," replied Mr. Fortescue. "I have her permission to do so, in order to satisfy Mrs. Wollaston's curiosity."

Adela stared at him in amazement. "Cecil White!" she ejaculated,—"she is Cecil White?"

"Certainly."

"She called herself Marjory, not Cecil," muttered Mrs. Wollaston.

"Very likely. Marjory happens to be her Christian name; but there are more Marjories than one in the world," added Mr. Fortescue.

"And you have seen her?—she has told you—"

"Everything," interrupted Mr. Fortescue; "more

than enough to prove your statement that you had derived a part of this wonderful story from her to be absolutely false. I have been in communication with Mrs. Hungerford," he added, "and from her I have learned the malicious falsehood which you told her about Lady Heversham. You yourself best know what object you had for slandering your cousin's wife, but I know it also, and so does Lord Heversham. You thought you had come across the latter's mistress, and you hoped to work upon her feelings and cause her to come between him and his wife. Your hatred and jealousy of Lady Heversham made you ready to work her an injury in any way you could. Mrs. Hungerford was very much upset at hearing of the unhappiness of a very old friend. You mistook her emotion for some stronger feeling and worked upon it in the hopes of gaining your own ends. You suspected that she knew Lady Heversham well; that the latter indeed might be a relative of hers,—though you could not understand how that could be."

"I discovered the truth," said Adela Wollaston,

angrily. "Your subterfuges are very ingenious, but I am not to be deceived by them. I confess I did not know that Mrs. Hungerford was Cecil White; but that does not make any difference,—except that she ought to have known better than to allow her lover to marry her stepsister."

"My counter-statement to your own," said Mr. Fortescue, "is that you have jumped very hastily at a conclusion which you cannot support by any reliable proofs, and you have not hesitated to tell a direct lie in assuring Lord Heversham that you had heard the most important part of your story from a lady who never said a word to you to justify such an assertion. That is quite enough to throw discredit on the remainder of your story; and unless you can prove that Mrs. Hungerford occupied the position you assert with regard to Lord Heversham you must see for yourself that the whole edifice, so carefully built up, crumbles away. Even if Lady Heversham were Mrs. Hungerford's stepsister, why, pray, should Lord Heversham not have married her? Will you answer me that, Mrs. Wollaston?"

"You are very ingenious, Mr. Fortescue; but we are not playing a game of poker, and it is of no use your trying to bluff me," replied Adela, stubbornly. "I will not retract one word of what I have said. If you force me to tell the story, the investigations which must inevitably follow will only confirm it. I am ready to swear that if this money is paid to me, nothing more shall ever be heard of the matter. If it is not paid," she added, between her teeth, "Muriel shall hear the story to-morrow, and all England will know it by the day after. It is for you to choose!"

"For God's sake, Charlie," exclaimed Hugh, "pay her over the money, and don't let us hear any more of this. It must never get to Muriel," he added, taking Mr. Fortescue aside. "That woman is desperate. Give her the money and let her go."

"And give her a hold over you for ever?" said Mr. Fortescue. "No, Hugh, anything but that! In six months' time she would want some more, and you would have the same thing to go through over

again. No, you cannot leave your wife's happiness and peace of mind in the hands of such a woman as that."

"But her story is true, and she knows it."

"That her story is true, yes! that she knows it to be so, no! It is mere guesswork on her part. She calculated upon having to deal with you alone. Let me manage the business, I entreat you!"

"Well," said Adela, who had walked to the window while this little conversation between the two men was carried on in an undertone, "have you chosen your course?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Fortescue; "but please remember that it is not a case of choosing,—you do not leave us any choice!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Wollaston, "you are obliged to confess that, are you? I am glad that you and Heversham take a sensible view of the matter at last. After all, you are perfectly right—for such a story," she added, turning to Hugh, "would not be an easy thing for your wife to live down. We are not very

particular in these days; but there is a limit, you know!"

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue, quietly, "I agree with you, Mrs. Wollaston. There is a limit, and, do you know, I think that you have reached it. I will ask you once more, and for the last time, whether you still adhere to the statements you have made, and whether you still demand five thousand pounds from Lord Heversham as your price for not talking about your alleged discovery? Please take time to consider your answer, for whatever it is we shall consider it as final."

Adela looked at him suspiciously. Something in his manner and in the tone of his voice caused her to feel a vague uneasiness.

"You have already had my decision," she replied coldly. "I have nothing more to say. Either Lord Heversham fulfils the promise he made to me some days ago, before you took upon yourself to interfere in the matter, or by to-morrow his wife knows the very equivocal position in which she is placed."

Mr. Fortescue's eyes blazed with a sudden anger.

"So be it," he said gravely. "Now, Mrs. Wollaston, please listen to our decision in this matter. Lord Heversham will not pay you one farthing, either now, or at any other time; and you will not repeat to any living soul the story by means of which you have attempted to extort money out of him."

"Who will prevent me?" said Mrs. Wollaston, and her voice was shrill with mingled rage and disappointment.

"*I* will prevent you," replied Mr. Fortescue. "Does it not strike you," he continued, "that seven thousand pounds is rather a large sum to get out of one family?"

"What do you mean?" gasped Adela, growing very pale.

"I am afraid that I must refresh your memory. Considering that the late Lord Heversham paid two thousand pounds to satisfy the claims of a certain person upon you, do you not think that it is a little ungrateful to demand five thousand more from his brother as the price of your silence about a story

which you cannot prove, and which has nothing criminal about it, even if you could prove it?"

Adela Wollaston staggered back into a chair, and sat staring at Mr. Fortescue with an expression of intense horror and fear on her face. She tried to speak, but her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and instead of words, a few inarticulate sounds issued from her lips.

"Good heavens, what does this mean?" exclaimed Hugh, looking from one to the other. "Explain yourself, Charlie, for I do not know what you are talking about."

"Yes, I will explain myself," replied Mr. Fortescue. "I wish that Mrs. Wollaston had not obliged me to do so; but, for the sake of others, I have no choice in the matter."

He drew a little despatch-box, which was lying on the table, towards him. It was the same box which he had taken out of his safe when Marjory had left him after her first interview with him in the Albany, a month or so previously. Adela had noticed it lying on the table, and had eyed it greedily. She

thought it contained the roll of notes which Hugh was to hand over to her.

Mr. Fortescue unlocked the despatch-box and took out the long blue envelope, from which he drew the letters and the folded paper.

Adela gave a faint shriek when she saw them, and made a wild effort to seize them from out of Mr. Fortescue's hands.

"No, no, no!" she cried; "anything but that. For God's sake give them to me and I will ask for nothing more, and the story of Mrs. Hungerford, true or false, will never be mentioned again by me. I swear it."

Mr. Fortescue put the papers behind his back with a quick movement. He was just in time, for Adela had sprung at him in her endeavour to wrench them from him.

"Wretch! villain! devil!" she cried hoarsely, "how did you come by them?"

"You forget," Mr. Fortescue replied, "that I am the late Lord Heversham's executor. He confided these papers to me in his lifetime, charging me to

keep them, and authorising me to communicate their contents to his brother and successor if circumstances arose which should make me think it advisable to do so. In my opinion, those circumstances have arisen. These three letters," he added, "are addressed to a certain physician, now disappeared.

"Terrified by threats of exposure, you went to your husband's cousin, Lord Heversham, and he bought your letters back from the doctor. They cost him two thousand pounds. Here," Mr. Fortescue added, unfolding the paper and showing it to her, "is your receipt for the money. Shall I read it to you? In it you acknowledge the fact that Lord Heversham paid this sum in order that certain letters of your writing might be given up to him. There is also the receipt of the doctor to whom the money was paid, undertaking, in return for the sum paid him, not to annoy you for the future in any way."

"My brother never told me of this!" exclaimed Hugh.

"No," answered Mr. Fortescue; "but your brother did not trust Mrs. Wollaston. Like yourself, he thought it more prudent that a third person should know why and under what circumstances he had paid a certain sum of money for her, and like yourself, he chose to confide in me. His action in this case was prompted solely by the desire to avoid a scandal upon a very unpleasant subject. You owed your escape in this instance, Mrs. Wollaston, to the accident of your husband's mother and Lord Heversham's father having been brother and sister."

There was a long silence at the conclusion of Mr. Fortescue's words. Adela sat like one dazed, looking helplessly at the two men opposite to her.

"What do you mean to do?" she whispered, rather than spoke, at length. She thought the letters had been destroyed by the late Lord Heversham. The receipt would not have mattered,—it was so worded that it might have referred to a debt or to any business matter.

Mr. Fortescue carefully replaced the papers in

the despatch-box before he replied to Adela Wollaston's question.

"What we mean to do is this, Mrs. Wollaston," he said quietly. "You will give us your word that you will not in any way, directly or indirectly, annoy either Lord or Lady Heversham, or the lady who is known as Mrs. White, the authoress. You will declare that you have no proofs as to the truth of the statements on which you have based your claim for the five thousand pounds, and that you made those statements while labouring under a misconception of the true facts."

"And if I do this?"

"These documents," replied Mr. Fortescue, laying his hand on the despatch-box as he spoke, "will remain as unknown as they have hitherto been. The alternative I need not suggest to you. Believe me, I regret to have been compelled to allude to this very unpleasant subject, but you have forced me to do so in order to protect wholly innocent people from your endeavours to injure them. Do you accept these terms?" he added.

"You are too strong for me; I must," said Adela, sullenly.

"I think that you are wise. Will you, if you please, read over this paper and put your signature at the bottom of it?" Mr. Fortescue took a paper out of his pocket and held it out to her. It contained, in a few lines, the substance of what he had already described as the conditions he would enforce. Adela Wollaston took it from him and glanced over it, and then, bending down over the table, she hastily signed her name to it.

"And now?" she said.

"I do not think that we need detain you any longer, Mrs. Wollaston."

Adela said nothing, but walked towards the door with faltering, uneven steps. Lord Heversham stopped her before she could reach it. "Stay," he said; "there is one thing more I wish to know,—is your husband aware that you wished to get money for keeping silence about this story of Mrs. Hungerford and my wife?"

"No!" answered Adela, emphatically; "he knew

what I suspected, but he had no idea that I intended to speak about it,—he would not have allowed me to do so."

"I am glad to hear that," said Hugh; "I thought, perhaps, that you had been acting with his knowledge."

"Before you go, Mrs. Wollaston," interposed Mr. Fortescue, "will you allow me to give you a little word of advice and warning? No," he added hastily, "it has nothing to do with the disagreeable things which we have been discussing. We will dismiss those from our mind, for they are not pleasant matters to dwell upon. The advice I would give you, and the warning, is meant well, believe me. You have never liked me, Mrs. Wollaston, nor even been very civil to me, but that was natural. I am not of your day nor of your set. Nevertheless, I do not want you to think that this has influenced me, or made me use my knowledge of certain past actions of yours to work you any harm. You obliged me to fight you with your own weapons. Will you believe me when I tell you that to-day I am sorry

for you. A few days ago I felt differently. I thought that you were actuated only by the vilest motives which can actuate human beings, and that you were merely seeking to extort money for money's sake."

Adela raised her eyes, which she had kept fixed on the ground, and looked at him.

"It was for money," she said brokenly, "for that more than for anything else. You do not know—"

"But I do know," said Mr. Fortescue, interrupting her. "I know perhaps more than you do. I have been making inquiries lately about your husband's financial position. Though I am an old fogy and have no business to be in the world of to-day, I happen somehow to have friends who tell me all I want to know of what is going on in it, and what people are saying about their neighbours. I am sorry to say that what I hear of your husband's position is not pleasant. He has been steadily losing money, and borrowing at a preposterous percentage to pay his losses. Something of this you probably

know. I hope that you know it, for it is, to my mind, some excuse—the only one—for your attempt to blackmail Lord Heversham. That your husband has told you all, however, I do not think very likely. Men generally put off telling their womenkind the worst till the last moment, and in that," added Mr. Fortescue, reflectively, "I think they often make a great mistake."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Wollaston; "what have you heard? For God's sake, tell me—are we ruined?"

"I am afraid that you are very near to it," said Mr. Fortescue, gravely; "and that is not the worst."

"Nothing can be worse!" returned Adela.

"Do you think so? And yet there are some people who are old-fashioned enough in their ideas to think that loss of honour is a worse thing than loss of money."

"It is the same thing, more or less," replied Mrs. Wollaston; "nobody thinks much of people who have no money."

Mr. Fortescue did not pursue the argument. He felt, indeed, that it would be a waste of time.

"Unfortunately," he resumed, "there are some things against which society must protect itself. One of these is obtaining money under false pretences, or by false signatures."

"By false signatures!" exclaimed Adela. "But that is forgery, is it not?"

"Precisely! That is what the law would call it. Now, Mrs. Wollaston," continued Mr. Fortescue, "I am in the position of being able to give you a timely warning. I am not sure that you deserve it, but I have no wish to constitute myself your judge. Your husband is on the very verge of ruin. Not only that, but in forty-eight hours from now, unless he is in Spain, he will be arrested for forgery."

Adela grew very white, and then she stamped her foot with rage. "Idiot! fool!" she exclaimed,— "whose name has he forged?"

"He had to meet heavy losses which he incurred in a certain speculation. His credit, even at a hundred or so per cent, was exhausted. He drew

a bill and asked a friend of his to back it for him. His friend refused. Three months afterwards the bill was presented for payment, with the latter's name on the back of it. The alleged backer of the bill has denied the authenticity of his signature and repudiated his liability, and the man who advanced the money is on the point of applying for a warrant to arrest Mr. George Wollaston on a charge of having forged his friend's signature."

"Who is the man—I mean the man whose signature George is supposed to have forged?" asked Adela.

"Your husband will tell you—but what I wish you to understand is this, Mrs. Wollaston: If it had not been for me, the warrant would have been already issued against your husband. I happen to know the individual whose name so mysteriously appears on the bill with which he had declined to have anything to do. At my request he has temporised, and allowed the money-lender to think that he had not finally decided to repudiate his

signature; but at the end of forty-eight hours from midday to-day he will not temporise any more. He has done so with the object of allowing your husband to get out of the country. Take my advice, Mrs. Wollaston; persuade your husband to go to Spain. The extradition treaties with that country do not comprise similar offences."

Adela Wollaston did not answer him, but walked to the door. She seemed to be unconscious of the two men's presence, and they heard her mutter to herself between her teeth the word "fool" over again.

Hugh went to the door and opened it for her.

"You will like a hansom called for you?" he asked.

"Thank-you," she replied, without looking at him, "I want nothing." So saying she crossed the hall, and as the servant threw open the front door for her, passed out into the street.

Hugh and Mr. Fortescue looked at each other in silence for some moments after she had left the house and they had heard the hall door close behind her.

"I think," said Mr. Fortescue, at length, "that she will never open her lips upon that subject again. The quieter she keeps now the better for her own sake."

"How did you hear of the last thing?" asked Hugh. "Has George really forged some fellow's name to a bill?"

"I'm afraid so. I heard of it only yesterday. I had commissioned a friend of mine to make some inquiries in the city concerning Wollaston's finances, for I could not help thinking that Mrs. Wollaston had pressing and immediate need of money. I thought that she and her husband were probably acting together to get that five thousand out of you. It appears that they were not, and I am inclined to believe Mrs. Wollaston's declaration that her husband knew nothing at all about her demand upon you."

"What is the amount for which he has forged?" asked Lord Heversham.

"Oddly enough for the same sum as that which you were so nearly paying to his wife,—five thousand

pounds. That is a mere coincidence, however, for you must recollect that this bill was drawn three months ago and became due very recently. Hinton, who is very unhappy about the business and dreads the thought of a scandal, said that he would do what he could, and he and I went off to see the Jew who had advanced the money. A very low specimen of the trade he was too! I fancy that all the more respectable money-lenders have been shy of Wollaston's paper for a long time now. He was very high and mighty at first, and talked about compounding a felony, and had all sorts of lofty moral objections for not putting the law into motion instantly. However, when we persuaded him that the sooner he got George Wollaston shut up for forgery the less chance he would have of seeing any of his money back he became more amenable to reason, and consented to let the bill stand for three days, at the end of which time, if Hinton still declared the signature to be a forgery, he would apply for a warrant against Wollaston."

"But has George had the money?" asked Hugh.

"Not all of it by any means. We extracted from the member of the chosen people that George had received about three thousand in cash; the remainder was swallowed up by the exorbitant rate of interest at which the money had been borrowed."

Hugh seemed to be considering something, for he did not reply immediately.

"Look here, Charlie," he said presently, "we must get the Wollastons out of this. You must go to Hinton and tell him to declare that he has made a mistake, and that the signature on the bill is his. I will indemnify him for any loss he may have over it. The Jew will be only too glad to get his money, and he will ask no more inconvenient questions. Compromise with the brute; pay him the money he actually paid George and five hundred more. He will probably be too thankful to take it; if he won't, pay him the whole sum."

Mr. Fortescue hesitated. "I do not know why you should do this," he said. "I do not even think that you ought to do it."

"But I do," replied Hugh. "To begin with, I can't have my father's nephew figuring in the dock as a forger if I can help it, and then you must remember that if it hadn't been for you I should probably have ended by paying his wife that five thousand pounds. After all, Charlie, her story was true, even though she didn't absolutely know it for a certainty. If it hadn't been for those papers which you produced, I believe she would have stuck to her story and we should have had to give in to her demands. She regarded the money as already in her pocket. Utterly heartless and worthless as she is, I can't help feeling sorry for her in a way. One never knows what money, or the want of it, will make people do."

"Especially people who must have the best of everything no matter who pays for it!" added Mr. Fortescue. "Well, Hugh," he continued, "I see your point, but I must say you are very generous,—as your brother was before you. I will go to Hinton, and we will see if between us we can square the money-lender; but we must be careful, for it is a

delicate matter, and I'm afraid the thing has already been talked about, though nobody has liked to say much as yet, owing, chiefly, to Hinton's very discreet behaviour about it. There is one thing, however, which I hope you will consent to do,—indeed I should think Hinton, who, after all, is the injured party, would insist upon it."

"What is that?"

"You must let the Wollastons remain under the impression that the charge of forgery is still hanging over their heads, and they must not have an idea that you have bought them out of this business. Mrs. Wollaston will be much better abroad, just now, for all reasons, and by degrees, when some time has elapsed, they can be allowed to know something of the truth. In the meantime let them go to some place, Spain or anywhere else, where they will be as little heard of as possible. In any case, so far as I can hear, even had it not been for this act of Wollaston's, they would have to fly the country or go through the Bankruptcy Court. Their debts, I believe, are enormous. Some years

ago, Adela Wollaston could calculate on getting some of them paid for her every now and then, but lately she has lost her looks considerably, and I don't imagine that people have come forward as they used to do."

"I think that your suggestion is a wise one," replied Hugh. "The sooner they both get across the Channel, the better. Look here, Charlie, take these notes," he added, extracting a roll of bank-notes from his pocket-book. "I had provided myself with them, thinking that they would be wanted for another purpose!"

"What are these for?" asked Mr. Fortescue, who saw that they amounted to five hundred pounds.

"Why, for those wretched Wollastons, to be sure! What are they going to live upon when they do get abroad, if they owe their last farthing here?"

"You certainly do not do things by halves, Hugh," remarked Mr. Fortescue. "It seems to me, if I may say so, that the Wollaston connection has

been rather an expensive one to your family! First of all your brother, and now you, have to pay up to get them out of difficulties."

"Don't let us talk any more about that story," said Hugh. "My brother was right to try to hush it up,—but I wonder that he thought her worth it."

"He did it for George's sake," replied Mr. Fortescue; "those letters implicate him in the business—"

"What! do you mean to say that her husband knew?"

"I am afraid so," said Mr. Fortescue. "You see," he continued, "the George Wollastons pride themselves upon being very *fin de siècle*. They certainly are. But it is a good thing for the human race that there are not more people like them. Now," he continued, "I must see Hinton with as little delay as possible, and I will tell him what you suggest. Before I do anything else, however, there is one visit that I must pay,—you can guess to whom?"

"Marjory?" said Hugh.

"Yes. It will be sufficient to tell her that Mrs. Wollaston has utterly failed in her attempt to injure you and Lady Heversham, and that she may dismiss all fears of her discovering the connection between herself and your wife from her mind. It will be a great relief to her, for she has been most terribly anxious about it."

"What will she do, Charlie?" asked Hugh, in a low voice.

"I imagine that she will go abroad again immediately," replied Mr. Fortescue.

"She never means that Muriel should know the relationship?"

"No. She wishes your wife to continue to think of her stepsister as dead. Now that she knows Mrs. Wollaston lied to her about Lady Heversham she is happier, she tells me, than she has been for a long time. There is only one thing, I think, which could complete her happiness."

"And that is?"

"To know that you returned your wife's affec-

tion for you, Hugh; to feel that her sacrifice of her own love was not made in vain."

And without waiting for Lord Heversham to reply, Mr. Fortescue took up his hat, and, leaving Hugh to his own thoughts, bade the servant waiting in the hall call him a hansom.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. FORTESCUE lost no time in communicating the result of the morning's interview to Marjory. He drove direct to her hotel after leaving Carlton House Terrace, and found her in her sitting-room, busily engaged upon some writing.

She started up nervously as he was announced, and came forward to greet him.

"You have come to tell me some news?" she said, looking inquiringly at him.

"Yes," replied Mr. Fortescue. "I have come to tell you that you need not fear lest Mrs. George Wollaston should make any mischief. We have succeeded in muzzling her most effectively; and," he added with a little laugh, "we shall take a lesson from the President of the Board of Agriculture and the dogs, and be very careful how we take the muzzle off!"

He had thought it right to warn Marjory that Adela Wollaston had told Hugh of their meeting at Riva, and that she had threatened to make mischief by telling the world that Lord Heversham had a mistress who was devoted to him, and considered herself to have been very badly treated when he married, in order that the story should get round to Lady Heversham and make her still more unhappy.

"Tell me what has happened," said Marjory. "You and Lord Heversham were to meet her, were you not? How have you succeeded in insuring silence?"

"She had no positive proof that her assertions were correct. Moreover, she made the mistake of declaring that she had heard a part of her story from you, not knowing, of course, that I had seen you and had had the whole version of your meeting at Riva from your own lips. She lied about you to Hugh and me, just as she lied about Lady Heversham to you. Mrs. Wollaston is not nearly so clever as she used to be,—but I suppose that

when one is desperate one is apt to lose one's head, and to say and do rash things."

"Desperate?" asked Marjory. "Why should she be desperate?"

"Money," replied Mr. Fortescue, laconically. "The Wollastons are penniless, and over head and ears in debt. Mrs. George thought she saw her way to getting some money out of Hugh. Her anxiety to show that she had some proofs to support her statements caused her to make several mistakes. One of them was the assertion that she had learned her information about you from yourself. That was a stupid thing to say."

"Well, so she did, in a way. If I had not betrayed so much feeling on the subject of Hugh's marriage, and if I had avoided that valet instead of speaking to him, she would never have suspected that I was more than an ordinary acquaintance of Hugh's. All that she knows, she learned from me, I fear."

"Possibly; but not directly, — not from any words, or from any hints of yours. That makes

all the difference. Besides, you are wrong when you say that she learned all from you, even in that indirect manner. She has heard the story of your parentage and of your married life from some other person."

"Who could that person be?" said Marjory, wonderingly. "My real self," she added with a faint smile, "is long ago supposed to be dead. No doubt my stepmother, who was the first to speak of me as dead, figuratively, by this time really believes that I am so."

"I cannot tell yet who Mrs. Wollaston's informant may have been; but I shall probably very soon hear. When I do so, I will tell you."

"But you have not told me yet how you have succeeded in preventing her from spreading her story, and causing it to get to Hugh's and Muriel's ears."

"You remember," said Mr. Fortescue, "my telling you that I believed I possessed the means of keeping Mrs. George quiet, and that, if necessary, I should use them?"

"Perfectly; I wondered what you meant."

"It was necessary, and I used them. Do not ask me to go into particulars. It is enough to tell you that I am in the possession of papers relating to an episode in Mrs. Wollaston's past life—a very disagreeable one—which she would not care to be published. My silence respecting that episode depends upon her withdrawal of her story and her absolute silence regarding it. You need not be at all afraid that she will break it,—she dare not."

"I will not ask you for any details," said Marjory; "but there is one thing I wish to know, if you will tell me. Did Mrs. Wollaston go to Hugh and tell him whom she suspected me to be?"

Mr. Fortescue paused for an instant before replying to her question.

"Yes," he said, "she did. In fact, she based her demand for a considerable sum of money on her assertion that you were Mrs. Ramsay, Col. Maitland Goring's daughter. It is better that you should know all. What has made her so positive of your identity I do not yet understand. I am convinced that in

reality she holds no proofs,—she would have produced them had she possessed them. My opinion is, she has jumped at a conclusion, arrived at by putting two and two together, and that, in the desperate circumstances in which she finds herself, she determined to confront Hugh with the whole story, trusting, after all, it would prove to be true, and that he would be ready to agree to her terms for keeping silence about it."

"And Hugh," asked Marjory in a low voice, "what was the effect upon him? Tell me everything, Mr. Fortescue; I must know all."

"You can imagine that Hugh was terribly shocked for your sake, as well as for that of his wife."

"It is of Muriel that I am thinking the most," said Marjory; "a man gets over these things, but with a woman it is different,—she could never be happy again if she knew. But that is not what I most wish you to tell me. Has the knowledge of who I am separated Hugh still more from Muriel? That is what I am so afraid of."

Mr. Fortescue looked at her attentively. "Your one wish is that things should be better between them, is it not?" he asked gently.

"God knows that it is!" replied Marjory. "Since I have known whom Hugh has married, and especially since I have heard from you how much Muriel cares for her husband, and how unhappy she is that he does not care for her, I have had only this one wish,—that all might come right between them."

"Then," said Mr. Fortescue, "I think that I have some more good news for you. Lady Heversham, I feel sure, is very much happier than she has ever been, and there is every prospect of greater happiness still coming to her. She hopes in two or three months' time to be a mother. That fact alone, I think, has been a means of bringing them nearer to each other. Hugh also is very different from what he was since you left him. I see in him unmistakable signs of the gradual development of a sincere affection for his wife. Admiration and respect for her he has always had,—nobody could know

Lady Heversham without feeling that for her,—and now love is coming. It is coming slowly,—almost unconsciously to himself,—but she sees it coming."

Marjory fixed her eyes upon him with a long, earnest gaze. "Do you really think so?" she said, and her voice trembled a little.

"I do. The events of the last few days have shown it to me very plainly. I think, moreover, that they have made Hugh realise he is not so indifferent to his wife as he believed himself to be. He had been so sure that his marriage must be a loveless one that I believe it never entered into his head until lately that his wife cared about him for himself. And you are glad that he should learn to return her love?" Mr. Fortescue concluded, with a glance at Marjory in which admiration and pity mingled.

"Glad? Yes, I am glad!" she said softly, as if speaking to herself. "Do you not see how much better it is? He would have married me once, but that would have spoiled his life. In time he would have come to feel he had done it as a duty to me,

out of a sense of honour. Well, I would not have that. I am proud, I suppose, and perhaps my sense of right and wrong is different from that of other women. I did not give him my love for what I could get out of him, and I saw no harm in giving it to him,—as I gave it. If I had had children, it would have been different; then I would have married him. But I knew that I should never have them. I should only have been a drawback to him in life, unable to give what he most needed. Besides, I did not wish that he should marry a woman with such a past as mine. A man must be able to respect his wife, though many a woman loves her husband without respecting him."

Mr. Fortescue stopped her by a gesture. "Do not talk of not being respected," he said. "There is no man who would not respect you; Hugh has never ceased to do so. Had he respected you less, he would not have accepted your decision to leave him as quietly as he did. It was because he respected you that he never tried to make you alter your decision, and never ventured to obtrude himself

upon you afterwards. If you have dispensed with matrimony as a useless formality in your own case, you have at least shown by your conduct what a lofty idea you entertain of its rights and its sanctity when once it is entered into! Many people,—most people, I may say,—situated as Hugh and yourself were, would not have allowed such an unavoidable accident as the former's marriage to interfere with their happiness."

"Thank God that we both saw that it must and should do so!" replied Marjory; "otherwise, think what our situation would have been at this moment! At least Muriel has not been wronged in any way, —except that I unconsciously wronged her by having given way to my foolish sentiment of not wishing to know even the name of the woman who was to be Hugh's wife. But now, perhaps, all will be for the best, only provided that Muriel never hears or knows of my existence."

"You do not mean ever to make yourself known to her?" said Mr. Fortescue.

"Can you ask it? No, a thousand times, no!

What happiness could it bring to her? She has been accustomed for years to think of me as dead, if she ever thought of me at all. She must continue to think so. It will be better for every reason."

"It is a perpetual sacrifice of yourself!"

"Now that I know that it is not made in vain, I am content. Revealing my existence to Hugh's wife would mean renewing my intercourse with Hugh. I cannot and I will not do that. It would be too much. I—I am not strong enough," added Marjory, tremulously. "You have told me that Hugh is beginning to return her affection, Mr. Fortescue," she continued; "would you wish me to do anything that might interfere with that?"

"No," he replied slowly, "I would not. You are perfectly right, and, what is more, you are carrying out your generous and disinterested love to its consistent termination."

"Its consistent termination?" repeated Marjory. "I wonder," she added with a faint smile, "what that will be!"

Mr. Fortescue looked at her, struck by a new note of sadness in her voice, but, before he had time to answer her, she spoke again. "You have not told me," she said, "what guarantee you have that Muriel should never learn the truth. Is your hold over Mrs. Wollaston a perpetual one, or may she some day feel that she can revenge herself upon us all by telling Muriel the whole story? And this other person whom she has never named,—the person from whom she declared to you that she had gained her information about myself,—how can you rely on silence there?"

"The Wollastons will never open their lips on the subject," answered Mr. Fortescue; "neither Mrs. Wollaston nor her husband. In two days' time they will be out of England, or, if not, George Wollaston will have to stand his trial for forgery."

Marjory uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Yes," he continued, "there seems to be no doubt that he has forged the name of a well-known man in London, as backing a bill in his favour

for five thousand pounds. He calculated on being able to pay up, I suppose, when the bill became due, which it did some few days ago. I heard a rumour of the matter, and asked the individual whose name appeared on the bill if it were true. Thanks to his forbearance, we were enabled to gain a respite of three days before proceedings would be instituted."

"But if he is arrested?"

"He will not be arrested. Lord Heversham has determined that he will indemnify the backer of the bill for any loss he may sustain, and I am now on my way to see the latter, in order to persuade him to accept the signature as his own. I think that he will consent to do so, in order to save a scandal. But even in the event of his doing so, the Wollastons will have to leave the country for some time. That, however, their money difficulties, which apparently beset them on all sides, would probably compel them to do in any case."

"Does Mrs. Wollaston know that Hugh is ready

to pay this money in order to prevent her husband from being arrested?" asked Marjory.

"No,—and we do not think it advisable that she should know it. When they leave England, they must leave it under the impression that a warrant is about to be issued. That will keep Mrs. George quiet for some time."

"It is like Hugh to be so generous."

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue, smiling; "but you know that Hugh would do anything to avoid disturbances and disagreeables, and besides, in this case he considers that, in a certain measure, the honour of his family is concerned."

"It is a dreadful thing to say," observed Marjory, "but, do you know, I am glad that Mr. Wollaston, as he was to forge somebody's name, did it just now. It is certainly better that he and his wife should be out of reach of Muriel for some time to come."

"I think you may make your mind easy that Lady Heversham will never hear anything of the story now," said Mr. Fortescue. "I more than

suspect," he added, "that the other person from whom Mrs. George Wollaston derived her information, and whose name she refused to divulge, was—Mrs. George Wollaston herself. However, that I hope to learn in a few hours' time, for I shall have to see her again."

"I hope it may prove to be so," said Marjory; "you will let me know, will you not? And you will come to see me again, I hope, before I go away."

"You are leaving London?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Yes,—almost immediately. There is nothing left for me to stay for. I shall ask you to do one thing for me, Mr. Fortescue, if you will."

"I will do anything in the world that I can for you," he replied earnestly,—"at any time."

"It will be kind of you if you will do this for me. I should like to know how things go with Hugh and Muriel; if the signs which you tell me that you see in Hugh develop, and if Muriel obtains the affection from him which she longs for.

I should like, also, to hear that her confinement is safely over, and if the child is a son. Will you write to me about these things? I will leave you an address which will always find me. You can understand that I shall be anxious to hear that all is well with them. And you will tell me something of yourself, too? I have often thanked God that I thought of you, and made up my mind to come and see you that afternoon at your rooms, although you did think that I had come upon a doubtful errand!" she concluded, with a smile.

"Do not remind me of my ungenerous thoughts, I entreat you!" replied Mr. Fortescue; "you do not know what coals of fire you have heaped upon my head since! Be sure that I will write to you and give you all the particulars which I know you would want to hear. But I hope you are not going away for a very long time," he added; "you will be in England again when the winter is over, will you not?"

"When the winter is over?" repeated Mar-

jory; "I cannot tell where I shall be,—when the winter is over. That will depend very much upon the nature of the news which you write to me," she added.

"You may rely upon it that it will be good news that I shall have to send you," said Mr. Fortescue.

"In that case," answered Marjory, with a grave smile, "you are not likely to see me in England. When the winter is over," she continued, "one longs for a little brightness and warmth,—it is always so long, the winter,—so very long!"

"Yes," answered Mr. Fortescue, gently, for he thought that he understood, "but it passes."

"'*Dopo il cattivo, viene il buono,*' as the Romans say," said Marjory, with a smile; "I suppose it does," she added a little wearily, "but when, and where?"

Mr. Fortescue took her hand and raised it for a moment to his lips. "I do not know!" he said,—"who does? But I think that there are some people in the world who are sure of finding it, for they carry it with them."

That evening Marjory received a letter from Mr. Fortescue which he sent by his servant to her hotel, with orders to the man to deliver it into her own hands. In it he told her that he had been able to arrange matters so that there would be no question of George Wollaston being arrested on a charge of forgery. The Mr. Hinton whose name he had forged as the backer of the bill for five thousand pounds had recognised the signature for his own, and the money-lender had been, as Lord Heversham had calculated, too glad to see his money again to ask any more questions on the subject. He went on to say that he had seen Mrs. George Wollaston and had found her completely broken down. "I could not have believed it," he wrote; "but the woman seems really to care for her husband. He had entreated her to let him leave the country alone, but nothing, she declared, would induce her to separate herself from him, and where he went she would go. She confessed to me that she had no absolute proofs of the story which she had told to Heversham, and that she had simply suspected

something of the kind from the emotion and distress which you displayed at Riva. At Paris, she accidentally came across a certain Colonel Milner, a man who had been many years in India and was then on his way home. From him she heard the whole story of your early life and marriage. Mrs. Wollaston, or somebody else, mentioned Lady Heversham as being a great beauty, and Colonel Milner asked who she had been before her marriage. On hearing the name, he began to talk about her family, and then about you, but pulled himself up when he remembered that the Wollastons and Hevershams were related. Mrs. Wollaston, however, made him tell her everything he knew—with the result that she immediately felt convinced that you were the stepsister in question whose family had disowned her. She declares that she sees a certain resemblance in you to Lady Heversham, and that when she first saw you at Riva she could not think of whom you reminded her, until she suddenly thought of Lady Heversham and knew that it was of her. This resemblance, she says, is more in

manner and certain little attributes than in any physical likeness,—and I may say that I think I see what she means, though, unless my attention had been drawn to it, I should not have remarked it. As I suspected, Mrs. Wollaston had no further proofs than her own intuition, and the person whose name she would not give up has no existence, for Colonel Milner's information was not given with any connection to yourself,—he believed Mrs. Ramsay to be dead. Desperately in want of money, Mrs. Wollaston determined to risk telling the whole story to Hugh, and to demand five thousand pounds from him for her silence, and that of her imaginary informant. She could not, of course, tell that she had quite spoiled her chances of success by declaring that she had any part of her information from you, —though, in a sense, it was true, for you had supplied it to her unconsciously! Now I am almost sorry for her. This rascality of her husband's has brought out the good in her. I never believed that any good existed in Mrs. George Wollaston; but there, as usual, I was wrong, and I ought to have

known better. There is no human being who is entirely bad—any more than there is one who is entirely good. Sometimes, indeed, there may be a character in which no trace of the good ever appears; but something good is there, though perhaps it is only God who knows where to look for it, and how to use it! Forgive the ramblings of an old man, and sleep in peace, for you have no further cause to fear that Lady Heversham will suffer from an extraordinary combination of circumstances, or that her husband will be otherwise than happy."

Marjory read Mr. Fortescue's letter several times, and then she threw it onto the fire.

"A few more weeks," she said to herself, watching the little red sparks chasing each other over the blackened remnants of the burned paper, "and then I shall have brought my love to a 'consistent termination.'"

CHAPTER X.

SOME months had elapsed since the disappearance of Mr. and Mrs. George Wollaston from London and English society. A few unpleasant rumours had been circulated as to the real reason for their sudden departure to the Continent, but in the absence of any reliable information these had died a natural death, and the generally accepted version of the story regarding them was that, having considerably "outrun the constable," they had found it necessary to place the Channel between them and their creditors. Some people said they would come back in four years, during which time they would have paid off their debts and be in a position to make fresh ones; others said that they could never back again except under the strictest secrecy. In a very short time people ceased to say anything about

them at all, and, unless it were by the tradespeople they were completely forgotten.

In the meantime much had happened at Heversham. Violet Goring's marriage had duly taken place in London, shortly after Christmas, and Mrs. Goring had absolutely refused to be present at the ceremony, or indeed to take any further notice whatever of her daughter's marriage, and both Violet and Muriel's letters to her upon the subject remained unanswered. Perhaps she was really in a worse state of health than her daughters believed, for in March, just before Muriel was expecting her confinement, a telegram arrived, addressed to Lady Heversham, announcing Mrs. Goring's death from acute inflammation of the lungs. The telegram was signed Randal; and a letter which followed close upon it from Mrs. Goring's spiritual adviser informed Muriel of the fact that her mother had left a recently executed will by which the reverend gentleman was appointed her sole executor, and that she had also left to him the bulk of her money, over which she had absolute power, in order, as the

writer expressed it, "that he should be enabled to use it for the advancement of the Lord's triumph, and that of his Holy Gospel, among the dark places of the Continent."

Muriel made no remark when she read the letter, and she handed it to her husband with a look of quiet contempt on her face. Lord Heversham's only comment was that he had no doubt of Mrs. Goring's money finding its way to some of the dark places alluded to, but that he did not feel so sure that it was the Lord's triumph which would be advanced by the fact.

Though Muriel had not, and did not pretend to have, any affection for her mother, nevertheless the news of her sudden death after an illness which had only lasted three or four days was a shock to her, and it precipitated her confinement. For a few hours she was in great danger, but, fortunately, the knowledge that she had brought a strong and healthy boy into the world helped her in her struggle for her own life, and in a short time she was out of all peril.

Hugh's satisfaction and delight at a son and heir being born to Heversham was intense. Ever since he had become aware of his wife's condition some months before, he had been unremitting in his care and attention, and Muriel, feeling that she was no longer an object of indifference to him, had cast aside her reserve with her husband, and had shown him in a thousand ways her attachment to him and the store she set upon his affection. In a few months the two had got to know each other more than in the three years of their married life, and with the knowledge had come a steadily growing affection on Hugh's part for his wife, which had been born, almost unconsciously to himself, from the respect and admiration which he had learned to have for her character. Muriel and her husband had remained quietly at Heversham ever since they had returned thither from London as soon as the former had been able to travel after her confinement. Lady Heversham was glad that she had not had to take her sister out in London that year. She looked forward to passing the summer at Heversham with her hus-

band and her child, and even had her mourning for Mrs. Goring not made a London season impossible, she would always have preferred spending her summer in the country.

It was already the beginning of August, and the weather was hot and glorious. Violet and her husband had arrived at Heversham for a few days on their way to Scotland. Mr. Fortescue had broken his journey to the north in the same way, and Lady Peebles had proposed herself, so that it was a small and intimate party which was sitting under the trees on the terrace at Heversham, round a little table at which Muriel was pouring out tea. The sun was gradually sinking down towards the hills in the west, and purple shadows began to steal over the wooded slopes of the park, with here and there a touch of red where the light glanced upon the stems of some lofty Scotch firs standing high up above the rocky back of the river. A long procession of rooks streamed across the cloudless sky, lazily cawing as they winged their way to their home for the night, and every now and then the harsh cry of a heron on

his way to his evening fishing seemed to produce a discordant note among the peaceful sounds of the fading summer day.

The little party gathered round the tea-table were not very talkative, but seemed to prefer to sit idly enjoying the quiet beauty of the landscape around them, thinking their own thoughts.

Mr. Fortescue looked at Muriel Heversham as, her guests provided for, she sat leaning back in a low wicker chair, and noted the look of happiness and calm content on her face. He thought that if Marjory could see her now, she too would be happy and convinced that by the sacrifice of herself she had achieved the good of those whom she loved; and then he sighed, and wondered why love should be so many-sided, and why pain should be the coin in which love so often took its payment.

A servant came from the house along the terrace bringing the letters and the London papers of that morning. Lady Peebles pounced upon the "Times;" her correspondence she could read at her leisure,

but she liked to be the first to see the news in the day's paper.

"Dear me!" she said presently, "how very sad!"

"What is very sad?" asked Muriel, looking up from her letters.

"Why, Cecil White. You know who I mean—the novelist. It appears that she has fallen over a precipice in the Austrian Tyrol and has been killed."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, sharply. Hugh started forward in his chair and then sat white and rigid, incapable of uttering a word. He was sitting slightly behind his wife, and she could not see the expression of his face.

"Yes," pursued Lady Peebles; "it is a telegram from Innsbruck headed 'Fatal Alpine Accident to an English Authoress.' I will read it out. 'The well-known authoress Mrs. White met with her death by a fall yesterday. Few particulars can be obtained, but it is supposed that the unfortunate lady must have been seized with faintness or sudden giddiness, and that she must have slipped upon a steep grassy

slope which terminated in a precipice of some four hundred feet. Mrs. White was an accomplished pedestrian, and was in the habit of making many excursions on foot alone. On this occasion, however, she was accompanied by a guide, as the expedition on which she was bent was one presenting some difficulties. The point at which the accident occurred was not one which called for any special precautions, and Mrs. White, apparently, had crossed the same ridge on several former occasions. How the accident took place can never be known, for the guide was a few paces in front of Mrs. White when she fell. He heard a sound, and, looking round, was horrified to see Mrs. White sliding with frightful rapidity down the grass slope to the brink of the precipice, over which she disappeared. Later intelligence reports that the body of the unfortunate lady has been recovered and taken to the village near Innsbruck in which she was staying.'"

"How terrible!" said Muriel. "Poor thing, I am so sorry for her! I only knew her from her books, but I am sure that she must have been a fine woman

and a good woman—oh, baby!" she broke off suddenly, as a nurse wheeling a perambulator appeared upon the terrace a little distance away—"baby! come to mother—come, darling!" and rising from her chair, she hurried to meet her child.

Mr. Fortescue shuddered a little, and looked away lest he should meet Lord Heversham's glance. It was terrible—the mother's joy coming at that moment. The unconscious cruelty of it, and the bitter irony, struck to the hearts of the two men, who thought that they read between the lines of the newspaper paragraph a message from the dead.

At length Mr. Fortescue looked at Hugh and their eyes met, and there was the same terrible inquiry in the expression of each,—the same doubt that was too horrible to be put into words.

"Did you know her?" asked Lady Peebles of Mr. Fortescue; "you look so shocked."

"Yes," he replied,—and there was a little catch in his voice as he spoke,—"I knew her. She was a woman who was unhappy in this world, because she was a good woman herself and wished others

to be so. It is strange how often good people are unhappy."

"Then she is not unhappy now," said Lady Peebles, gravely.

Mr. Fortescue's look wandered over the landscape bathed in the calm evening light, and then to the purple hills beyond, the tops of which were still catching the golden rays of the setting sun.

"No," he repeated, "she is not unhappy now,—if she can see those whom she has left behind her for whom she cared."

When he looked again towards the place where Hugh had been sitting he saw that his chair was empty. Lord Heversham had slipped away unobserved. Mr. Fortescue saw his tall figure at the further end of the terrace. He was walking slowly, with his head bent down, and Mr. Fortescue watched him until he disappeared beneath the gateway leading into the churchyard.

During the days that followed, the newspapers were kept from Muriel. Mr. Fortescue feared lest at the inquiry which must of necessity be made into

Marjory's death her identity with Colonel Maitland's daughter should be established, and that Lady Heversham should learn of it without due preparation.

His fears turned out to be justified; for it was not to be supposed that so well known a writer as Cecil White could meet with so tragic a fate without the public curiosity being excited about her and her real name and antecedents. Papers which were found in her apartment at Venice revealed her parentage and her married name, and the world soon learned that "Cecil White" had been the *nom de plume* which for years had concealed the identity of Colonel Maitland's erring and sorely punished daughter, Marjory Ramsay.

Some weeks after her death, Mr. Fortescue was greatly surprised at receiving a letter from a firm of solicitors in which he was informed that the late Mrs. Ramsay—or White—had left to him a considerable sum of money, and such of the copyrights of her works as were in her possession, subject to certain conditions which were mentioned in a letter that, to-

gether with some other documents and articles of personal property, they had instructions to deliver into his hands.

On opening this letter Mrs. Fortescue found that Marjory had left to him the whole of her personal fortune and of the money which she had made by her books. The bequest was coupled with no absolute condition, but the letter contained a request that he would use his discretion to make such provisions in his own will as would insure that the money which he had inherited from her should pass at his death to Lady Heversham, or, she being deceased, to her younger children or child.

Among the articles which the solicitors delivered to him in a sealed packet was the copy of the miniature painted of Muriel as a child which Marjory had shown Mr. Fortescue when she had paid him the memorable visit in his rooms in the Albany the autumn before.

Mr. Fortescue searched in vain for any letter or paper which should cast any light upon the true nature of Marjory's end, but without success. She

had not left any sign that she had ever contemplated such a step as suicide, and nothing had transpired at the inquiry into her death to justify any suspicion that it had been otherwise than the result of an accident. The guide declared that he had accompanied her on several excursions in the mountains, and that on this last occasion she had been the same as usual. She was always kind and generous, he said, and ready to talk to the people of the village where she had been staying some weeks that summer; she liked to learn all about their lives, and they were always ready to speak of them to one who was so sympathetic. He explained that on this day she had seemed to him to be quite in her usual spirits,--though she was always very quiet,—and she had talked to him as usual.

Among those to whom Marjory had left sums of money, such as her Venetian servants, the name of this very guide had been inserted by a codicil to her will. He was to receive so substantial a sum for a man in his condition that Mr. Fortescue wondered whether Marjory had not purposely left it to him,

fearing that blame might be cast upon him for the accident, and that the latter might prejudice him in his profession. This suspicion had been increased by his hearing of the man's astonishment at receiving the money. He had not accompanied the lady more than half a dozen times, he said, and she had always paid him the regulation fee and given him a liberal present over and above it for himself. If Mr. Fortescue could not kill his doubt, neither could Hugh, and by degrees they both tacitly agreed to allude no more to the question. No good could come of any speculation with regard to it, and it seemed to both of them that they would be guilty of an irreverence to the dead in persisting to draw aside the veil which shrouded the last short scene of Marjory's life in the phase in which they had known her. She had passed through another of the many gateways on the road of Eternity, and whether it was her own hand that had opened it to her, or that of her Maker, was not for them to inquire into too closely. All that they could hope and believe was, that her journey over the next portion of the Road

of Life might be attended with an increase of happiness and peace, and that at some point on the Way they might be permitted to overtake her.

The momentary interest and excitement which the melancholy end of the novelist, Cecil White, had aroused soon died away, for it was the commencement of the holiday season, and people had pleasanter things to think of and talk about than accidents and sudden deaths. Nevertheless, it had been found necessary to tell both Muriel and Violet the connection which had existed between them and Marjory.

Mr. Fortescue had given Lord Heversham the little miniature of Muriel in her childish days, and one day when he and his wife were alone together Hugh put it into her hands.

Muriel's eyes filled with tears as she looked at it. "Why did she hide herself from us?" she asked; "it was not fair to me, for I had never forgotten her,—I cried so much when they told us that she was dead in India. Whatever she had done I should never have believed that she had

been anything but good, really. I should always have been her sister; and you, you would have been a brother to her, Hugh, would you not?"

"Hush, Muriel; for God's sake, hush! you do not know what you are saying!" he exclaimed.

Muriel looked at him curiously. "Why?" she insisted gently, "what have I said to distress you?" Her husband came and stood close beside her, taking her hand in his own as he spoke. "Listen, Muriel," he said, in a low voice. "I cannot and I will not keep this thing a secret between us. While *she* was alive I could not, I dared not speak; I had to protect her honour as well as your own."

Lady Heversham grew very white, but she did not speak.

"Now," Hugh continued, "that she is beyond the reach of harm, I can confess to you, her half-sister, who loved her, why she could never have made herself known to you. Listen, Muriel. Many years ago I met your half-sister; she called herself Mrs. Hungerford,—Marjory Hungerford. We—loved one another. I would have married her, but she

would never hear of marriage. Her first marriage was enough, she said, to prevent her from tying herself to another man. That was not her true reason. Her true reason was that she loved me too well to marry me, for she considered that she was a disgraced and ruined woman. Well, you can imagine what the alternative was. She made me promise never to ask her real name or parentage, and I never did do so. I never had any idea who she really was. The time came when my brother's death made it necessary for me to marry. Then she left me; left me absolutely and for ever, and I have never seen her since. There is no more to tell you; it is a very short story," he added, holding Muriel's hand a little tighter. "I married you, and she never knew to whom I was married, for she had gone abroad before you and I ever saw each other."

He stopped and looked anxiously down into his wife's eyes.

"I think I knew," she said, very gently. "I think I suspected it all along—and oh! I was

so sorry for you—so terribly sorry for you, Hugh!"

"You knew!" he exclaimed. "Muriel!"

"No, no, not that!" she replied hurriedly. "I could not know or suspect that—how should I? But I knew that you did not love me. I knew that you cared for some other woman—some woman whose name was Marjory. I often thought it a curious coincidence that it should be the name of my half-sister, and I was so afraid you would never love me, Hugh, because of her, and that I should only become a burden to you,—a useless burden, not able even to bear you the child you wanted. Can you not understand the bitterness of it? You never knew—you never thought that I loved you! but now—"

"But now?" repeated Hugh, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

"Now it is all so different! Something came to you—the child!"

"Love came—thanks to *her,* and to your own great love and patience. God alone knows what

I have done to deserve such love as has been given to me!"

"I only know of mine—tell me of hers—of Marjory's," whispered Muriel.

And drawing her closer to him he told her the whole story to the end.

When he ceased speaking she clung to him in silence for a minute or two. "It must not make any difference, Muriel," he said, as she did not speak, and a great anxiety was in his voice. "A stepsister —that is not—"

"Hush," replied Muriel, gently; "she sacrificed herself for your happiness—and," she added very softly, "is not your happiness mine?"

In the churchyard at Heversham there stands a plain cross of white marble surmounting a grave over which wild-flowers are planted and allowed to grow at their own sweet will and pleasure. The base of the cross bears an inscription to the effect that it is to the memory of Marjory, eldest daughter of Colonel

and Mrs. Maitland, with the name "Cecil White" in brackets.

There is no quotation from Scripture,—only the wild-flowers speak to the living.

Some of these do not understand what they say, and are rather scandalised that when the Heversham conservatories are full of rare and costly plants, weeds should be thought good enough for the grave of Lady Heversham's half-sister.

But Marjory loved the weeds best.

THE END.

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Rev. W. Adams, † 1848.

Sacred Allegories 1 v.

Grace Aguilar, † 1847.

Home Influence 2 v. — The Mother's Recompense 2 v.

Hamilton Aïdé.

Rita 1 v. — Carr of Carrlyon 2 v. — The Marstons 2 v. — In that State of Life 1 v. — Morals and Mysteries 1 v. — Penruddocke 2 v. — "A nine Days' Wonder" 1 v. — Poet and Peer 2 v. — Introduced to Society 1 v.

W. Harrison Ainsworth, † 1882.

Windsor Castle 1 v. — Saint James's 1 v. — Jack Sheppard (with Portrait) 1 v. — The Lancashire Witches 2 v. — The Star-Chamber 2 v. — The Flitch of Bacon 1 v. — The Spendthrift 1 v. — Mervyn Clitheroe 2 v. — Ovingdean Grange 1 v. — The Constable of the Tower 1 v. — The Lord Mayor of London 2 v. — Cardinal Pole 2 v. — John Law 2 v. — The Spanish Match 2 v. — The Constable de Bourbon 2 v. — Old Court 2 v. — Myddleton Pomfret 2 v. — The South-Sea Bubble 2 v. — Hilary St. Ives 2 v. — Talbot Harland 1 v. — Tower Hill 1 v. — Boscobel 2 v. — The Good Old Times 2 v. — Merry England 2 v. — The Goldsmith's Wife 2 v. — Preston Fight 2 v. — Chetwynd Calverley 2 v. — The Leaguer of Lathom 2 v. — The Fall of Somerset 2 v. — Beatrice Tyldesley 2 v. — Beau Nash 2 v. — Stanley Brereton 2 v.

Louisa M. Alcott (Am.), † 1888.

Little Women 2 v. — Little Men 1 v. — An Old-Fashioned Girl 1 v. — Jo's Boys 1 v.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich (Am.).

Marjorie Daw and other Tales 1 v. — The Stillwater Tragedy 1 v.

Mrs. Alexander (Hector).

A Second Life 3 v. — By Woman's Wit 1 v. — Mona's Choice 2 v. — A Life Interest 2 v. — A Crooked Path 2 v. — Blind Fate 2 v. — A Woman's Heart 2 v. — For His Sake 2 v. — The Snare of the Fowler 2 v. — Found Wanting 2 v. — A Ward in Chancery 1 v. — A Choice of Evils 2 v. — A Fight with Fate 2 v. — A Winning Hazard 1 v. — A Golden Autumn 1 v. — Mrs. Crichton's Creditor 1 v. — Barbara, Lady's Maid and Peeress 1 v. — The Cost of Her Pride 2 v. — Brown, V. C. 1 v. — Through Fire to Fortune 1 v. — A Missing Hero 1 v. — The Yellow Fiend 1 v.

Alice, Grand-Duchess of Hesse, † 1878.

Letters to Her Majesty the Queen (with Portrait). With a Memoir by H. R. H. Princess Christian 2 v.

Lizzie Alldridge.

By Love and Law 2 v. — The World she awoke in 2 v.

Grant Allen, † 1899.

The Woman who did 1 v.

Author of "All for Greed" (Baroness de Bury).

All for Greed 1 v. — Love the Avenger 2 v.

F. Anstey (Guthrie).

The Giant's Robe 2 v. — A Fallen Idol 1 v. — The Pariah 3 v. — The Talking Horse and other Tales 1 v. — Voces Populi *(First and Second Series)* 1 v. — The Brass Bottle 1 v.

Mrs. Argles, *vide* Mrs. Hungerford.

Author of "The Aristocrats."

The Aristocrats 1 v.

Sir Edwin Arnold.

The Light of Asia (with Portrait) 1 v.

Matthew Arnold, † 1888.
Essays in Criticism 2 v. — Essays in Criticism *(Second Series)* 1 v.

Mrs. Gertrude Atherton (Am.).
American Wives and English Husbands 1 v. — The Californians 1 v. — Patience Sparhawk and her Times 2 v. — Senator North 2 v. — The Doomswoman 1 v.

Jane Austen, † 1817.
Sense and Sensibility 1 v. — Mansfield Park 1 v. — Pride and Prejudice 1 v. — Northanger Abbey, and Persuasion 1 v. — Emma 1 v.

Author of "Autobiography of Lutfullah," *vide* E. B. Eastwick.

Richard Bagot.
A Roman Mystery 2 v. — Casting of Nets 2 v.

S. Baring-Gould.
Mehalah 1 v. — John Herring 2 v. — Court Royal 2 v.

Lady Barker (Lady Broome).
Station Life in New Zealand 1 v. — Station Amusements in New Zealand 1 v. — A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa 1 v. — Letters to Guy, and A Distant Shore—Rodrigues 1 v.

Frank Barrett.
The Smuggler's Secret 1 v. — Out of the Jaws of Death 2 v.

J. M. Barrie.
Sentimental Tommy 2 v. — Margaret Ogilvy 1 v. — Tommy and Grizel 2 v.

Author of "Miss Bayle's Romance," *vide* W. Fraser Rae.

Rev. Robert H. Baynes.
Lyra Anglicana, Hymns and Sacred Songs 1 v.

Lord Beaconsfield, *vide* Disraeli.

Averil Beaumont (Mrs. Hunt).
Thornicroft's Model 2 v.

Currer Bell (Charlotte Brontë—Mrs. Nicholls), † 1855.
Jane Eyre 2 v. — Shirley 2 v. — Villette 2 v. — The Professor 1 v.

Ellis & Acton Bell (Emily, † 1848, and Anne, † 1849, Brontë).
Wuthering Heights, and Agnes Grey 2 v.

Edward Bellamy (Am.), † 1898.
Looking Backward 1 v.

Frank Lee Benedict (Am.).
St. Simon's Niece 2 v.

E. F. Benson.
Dodo 1 v. — The Rubicon 1 v. — Scarlet and Hyssop 1 v.

Sir Walter Besant, † 1901.
The Revolt of Man 1 v. — Dorothy Forster 2 v. — Children of Gibeon 2 v. — The World went very well then 2 v. — Katharine Regina 1 v. — Herr Paulus 2 v. — The Inner House 1 v. — The Bell of St. Paul's 2 v. — For Faith and Freedom 2 v. — Armorel of Lyonesse 2 v. — Verbena Camellia Stephanotis, etc. 1 v. — Beyond the Dreams of Avarice 2 v. — The Master Craftsman 2 v. — A Fountain Sealed 1 v. — The Orange Girl 2 v. — The Fourth Generation 1 v. — The Lady of Lynn 2 v.

Sir Walter Besant, † 1901, & James Rice, † 1882.
The Golden Butterfly 2 v. — Ready-Money Mortiboy 2 v. — By Celia's Arbour 2 v.

M. Betham-Edwards.
The Sylvestres 1 v. — Felicia 2 v. — Brother Gabriel 2 v. — Forestalled 1 v. — Exchange no Robbery, and other Novelettes 1 v. — Disarmed 1 v. — Doctor Jacob 1 v. — Pearla 1 v. — Next of Kin Wanted 1 v. — The Parting of the Ways 1 v. — For One and the World 1 v. — The Romance of a French Parsonage 1 v. — France of To-day 1 v. — Two Aunts and a Nephew 1 v. — A Dream of Millions 1 v. — The Curb of Honour 1 v. — France of To-day (*Second Series*) 1 v. — A Romance of Dijon 1 v. — The Dream-Charlotte 1 v. — A Storm-Rent Sky 1 v. — Reminiscences 1 v. — The Lord of the Harvest 1 v. — Anglo-French Reminiscences, 1875—1899 1 v. — A Suffolk Courtship 1 v. — Mock Beggars' Hall 1 v.

Ambrose Bierce (Am.).
In the Midst of Life 1 v.

Mabel C. Birchenough.
Potsherds 1 v.

E. Bisland, *v.* Rhoda Broughton.

Prince Bismarck, *vide* Butler.

Vide also Wilhelm Görlach (Collection of German Authors, p. 29).

William Black, † 1898.

A Daughter of Heth 2 v. — In Silk Attire 2 v. — The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton 2 v. — A Princess of Thule 2 v. — Kilmeny 1 v. — The Maid of Killeena, and other Stories 1 v. — Three Feathers 2 v. — Lady Silverdale's Sweetheart, and other Stories 1 v. — Madcap Violet 2 v. — Green Pastures and Piccadilly 2 v. — Macleod of Dare 2 v. — White Wings 2 v. — Sunrise 2 v. — The Beautiful Wretch 1 v. — Mr Pisistratus Brown, M.P., in the Highlands; The Four Macnicols; The Pupil of Aurelius 1 v. — Shandon Bells (with Portrait) 2 v. — Judith Shakespeare 2 v. — The Wise Women of Inverness, etc. 1 v. — White Heather 2 v. — Sabina Zembra 2 v. — The Strange Adventures of a House-Boat 2 v. — In Far Lochaber 2 v. — The New Prince Fortunatus 2 v. — Stand Fast, Craig-Royston! 2 v. — Donald Ross of Heimra 2 v. — The Magic Ink, and other Tales 1 v. — Wolfenberg 2 v. — The Handsome Humes 2 v. — Highland Cousins 2 v. — Briseis 2 v. — Wild Eelin 2 v.

Author of "The Black-Box Murder."

The Black-Box Murder 1 v.

Richard Doddridge Blackmore, † 1900.

Alice Lorraine 2 v. — Mary Anerley 3 v. — Christowell 2 v. — Tommy Upmore 2 v. — Perlycross 2 v.

"Blackwood."

Tales from "Blackwood" *(First Series)* 1 v. — Tales from "Blackwood" *(Second Series)* 1 v.

Isa Blagden, † 1873.

The Woman I loved, and the Woman who loved me; A Tuscan Wedding 1 v.

Countess of Blessington (Marguerite Gardiner), † 1849.

Meredith 1 v. — Strathern 2 v. — Memoirs of a Femme de Chambre 1 v. — Marmaduke Herbert 2 v. — Country Quarters (with Portrait) 2 v.

Baroness Bloomfield.

Reminiscences of Court and Diplomatic Life (with the Portrait of Her Majesty the Queen) 2 v.

Rolf Boldrewood.

Robbery under Arms 2 v. — Nevermore 2 v.

Miss Braddon (Mrs. Maxwell).

Lady Audley's Secret 2 v. — Aurora Floyd 2 v. — Eleanor's Victory 2 v. — John Marchmont's Legacy 2 v. — Henry Dunbar 2 v. — The Doctor's Wife 2 v. — Only a Clod 2 v. — Sir Jasper's Tenant 2 v. — The Lady's Mile 2 v. — Rupert Godwin 2 v. — Dead-Sea Fruit 2 v. — Run to Earth 2 v. — Fenton's Quest 2 v. — The Lovels of Arden 2 v. — Strangers and Pilgrims 2 v. — Lucius Davoren 3 v. — Taken at the Flood 3 v. — Lost for Love 2 v. — A Strange World 2 v. — Hostages to Fortune 2 v. — Dead Men's Shoes 2 v. — Joshua Haggard's Daughter 2 v. — Weavers and Weft 1 v. — In Great Waters, and other Tales 1 v. — An Open Verdict 3 v. — Vixen 3 v. — The Cloven Foot 3 v. — The Story of Barbara 2 v. — Just as I am 2 v. — Asphodel 3 v. — Mount Royal 2 v. — The Golden Calf 2 v. — Flower and Weed 1 v. — Phantom Fortune 3 v. — Under the Red Flag 1 v. — Ishmael 3 v. — Wyllard's Weird 3 v. — One Thing Needful 2 v. — Cut by the County 1 v. — Like and Unlike 2 v. — The Fatal Three 2 v. — The Day will come 2 v. — One Life, One Love 2 v. — Gerard 2 v. — The Venetians 2 v. — All along the River 2 v. — Thou art the Man 2 v. — The Christmas Hirelings, etc. 1 v. — Sons of Fire 2 v. — London Pride 2 v. — Rough Justice 2 v. — In High Places 2 v. — His Darling Sin 1 v. — The Infidel 2 v.

Lady Brassey, † 1887.

A Voyage in the "Sunbeam" 2 v. — Sunshine and Storm in the East 2 v. — In the Trades, the Tropics and the Roaring Forties 2 v.

Author of "The Bread-Winners" (Am.).

The Bread-Winners 1 v.

Bret Harte, *vide* Harte.

Rev. William Brock, † 1875.

Sir Henry Havelock, K. C. B. 1 v.

Charlotte Brontë, *vide* Currer Bell.

Emily & Anne Brontë, *vide* Ellis & Acton Bell.

Shirley Brooks, † 1874.

The Silver Cord 3 v. — Sooner or Later 3 v.

Lady Broome, *vide* Lady Barker.

Rhoda Broughton.
Cometh up as a Flower 1 v. — Not wisely, but too well 2 v. — Red as a Rose is She 2 v. — Tales for Christmas Eve 1 v. — Nancy 2 v. — Joan 2 v. — Second Thoughts 2 v. — Belinda 2 v. — Doctor Cupid 2 v. — Alas! 2 v. — Mrs. Bligh 1 v. — A Beginner 1 v. — Scylla or Charybdis? 1 v. — Dear Faustina 1 v. — The Game and the Candle 1 v. — Foes in Law 1 v.

Rhoda Broughton & Elizabeth Bisland.
A Widower Indeed 1 v.

John Brown, † 1882.
Rab and his Friends, and other Papers 1 v.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, † 1861.
A Selection from her Poetry (with Portrait) 1 v. — Aurora Leigh 1 v.

Robert Browning, † 1889.
Poetical Works (with Portrait) 4 v.

Frank T. Bullen.
The Cruise of the "Cachalot" 2 v.

Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, † 1873.
Pelham (with Portrait) 1 v. — Eugene Aram 1 v. — Paul Clifford 1 v. — Zanoni 1 v. — The Last Days of Pompeii 1 v. — The Disowned 1 v. — Ernest Maltravers 1 v. — Alice 1 v. — Eva, and The Pilgrims of the Rhine 1 v. — Devereux 1 v. — Godolphin and Falkland 1 v. — Rienzi 1 v. — Night and Morning 1 v. — The Last of the Barons 2 v. — Athens 2 v. — The Poems and Ballads of Schiller 1 v. — Lucretia 2 v. — Harold 2 v. — King Arthur 2 v. — The New Timon, and St. Stephen's 1 v. — The Caxtons 2 v. — My Novel 4 v. — What will he do with it? 4 v. — Dramatic Works 2 v. — A Strange Story 2 v. — Caxtoniana 2 v. — The Lost Tales of Miletus 1 v. — Miscellaneous Prose Works 4 v. — Odes and Epodes of Horace 2 v. — Kenelm Chillingly 4 v. — The Coming Race 1 v. — The Parisians 4 v. — Pausanias, the Spartan 1 v.

Henry Lytton Bulwer (Lord Dalling), † 1872.
Historical Characters 2 v. — The Life of Viscount Palmerston 3 v.

John Bunyan, † 1688.
The Pilgrim's Progress 1 v.

Author of "Buried Alone" (Charles Wood).
Buried Alone 1 v.

Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett (Am.).
Through one Administration 2 v. — Little Lord Fauntleroy 1 v. — Sara Crewe, and Editha's Burglar 1 v. — The Pretty Sister of José 1 v. — A Lady of Quality 2 v. — His Grace of Osmonde 2 v.

Miss Burney (Madame D'Arblay), † 1840.
Evelina 1 v

Robert Burns, † 1796.
Poetical Works (with Portrait) 1 v.

Richard F. Burton, † 1890.
A Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina 3 v.

Baroness de Bury, *vide* "All for Greed."

A. J. Butler.
Bismarck. His Reflections and Reminiscences. Translated from the great German edition, under the supervision of A. J. Butler. With two Portraits. 3 v.

Mrs. B. H. Buxton, † 1881.
Jennie of "The Prince's," 2 v. — Won! 2 v. — Great Grenfell Gardens 2 v. — Nell—on and off the Stage 2 v. — From the Wings 2 v.

Lord Byron, † 1824.
Poetical Works (with Portrait) 5 v.

Mrs. Mannington Caffyn, (Iota).
A Yellow Aster 1 v. — Children of Circumstance 2 v. — Anne Mauleverer 2 v.

Hall Caine.
The Bondman 2 v. — The Manxman 2 v. — The Christian 2 v. — The Eternal City 3 v.

Verney Lovett Cameron.
Across Africa 2 v.

Mrs. Campbell Praed, *vide* Praed.

Rosa Nouchette Carey.
Not Like other Girls 2 v. — "But Men must Work" 1 v. — Sir Godfrey's Granddaughters 2 v. — The Old, Old Story 2 v. — Herb of Grace 2 v.

Thomas Carlyle, † 1881.
The French Revolution 3 v. — Frederick the Great 13 v. — Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches 4 v. — The Life of Schiller 1 v.

Alaric Carr.
Treherne's Temptation 2 v.

Egerton Castle.
Consequences 2 v. — "La Bella," and Others 1 v.

Mrs. Elizabeth Rundle Charles, † 1896, *vide* Author of "Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family."

Maria Louisa Charlesworth, † 1880.
Oliver of the Mill 1 v.

Mary Cholmondeley.
Diana Tempest 2 v. — Red Pottage 2 v.

Princess Christian, *vide* Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse.

Author of "Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family" (Mrs. E. Rundle Charles), † 1896.
Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family 2 v. — The Draytons and the Davenants 2 v. — On Both Sides of the Sea 2 v. — Winifred Bertram 1 v. — Diary of Mrs. Kitty Trevylyan 1 v. — The Victory of the Vanquished 1 v. — The Cottage by the Cathedral and other Parables 1 v. — Against the Stream 2 v. — The Bertram Family 2 v. — Conquering and to Conquer 1 v. — Lapsed, but not Lost 1 v.

Alfred Clark.
The Finding of Lot's Wife 1 v.

Samuel L. Clemens, *vide* Twain.

Mrs. W. K. Clifford.
Love-Letters of a Worldly Woman 1 v. — Aunt Anne 2 v. — The Last Touches, and other Stories 1 v. — Mrs. Keith's Crime 1 v. — A Wild Proxy 1 v. — A Flash of Summer 1 v. — A Woman Alone 1 v. — Woodside Farm 1 v.

Mrs. Caroline Clive, † 1873, *vide* Author of "Paul Ferroll."

Frances Power Cobbe.
Re-Echoes 1 v.

C. R. Coleridge.
An English Squire 2 v.

M. E. Coleridge.
The King with two Faces 2 v.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, † 1834.
Poems 1 v.

Charles Allston Collins, † 1873.
A Cruise upon Wheels 2 v.

Mortimer Collins, † 1876.
Sweet and Twenty 2 v. — A Fight with Fortune 2 v.

Wilkie Collins, † 1889.
After Dark 1 v. — Hide and Seek 2 v. — A Plot in Private Life, etc. 1 v. — The Woman in White 2 v. — Basil 1 v. — No Name 3 v. — The Dead Secret, and other Tales 2 v. — Antonina 2 v. — Armadale 3 v. — The Moonstone 2 v. — Man and Wife 3 v. — Poor Miss Finch 2 v. — Miss or Mrs.? 1 v. — The New Magdalen 2 v. — The Frozen Deep 1 v. — The Law and the Lady 2 v. — The Two Destinies 1 v. — My Lady's Money, and Percy and the Prophet 1 v. — The Haunted Hotel 1 v. — The Fallen Leaves 2 v. — Jezebel's Daughter 2 v. — The Black Robe 2 v. — Heart and Science 2 v. — "I say No," 2 v. — The Evil Genius 2 v. — The Guilty River, and The Ghost's Touch 1 v. — The Legacy of Cain 2 v. — Blind Love 2 v.

Author of "Cometh up as a Flower," *vide* Rhoda Broughton.

Joseph Conrad.
An Outcast of the Islands 2 v. — Tales of Unrest 1 v.

Hugh Conway (F. J. Fargus), † 1885.
Called Back 1 v. — Bound Together 2 v. — Dark Days 1 v. — A Family Affair 2 v. — Living or Dead 2 v.

James Fenimore Cooper (Am.), † 1851.
The Spy (with Portrait) 1 v. — The Two Admirals 1 v. — The Jack O'Lantern 1 v.

Mrs. Cooper, *vide* Katharine Saunders.

Marie Corelli.
Vendetta! 2 v. — Thelma 2 v. — A Romance of Two Worlds 2 v. — "Ardath."

3 v. — Wormwood. A Drama of Paris 2 v. — The Hired Baby, with other Stories and Social Sketches 1 v. — Barabbas; A Dream of the World's Tragedy 2 v. — The Sorrows of Satan 2 v. — The Mighty Atom 1 v. — The Murder of Delicia 1 v. — Ziska 1 v. — Boy. A Sketch. 2 v. — The Master-Christian 2 v.

Mrs. Everard Cotes.

Those Delightful Americans 1 v.

Author of "The County."

The County 1 v.

George Lillie Craik, † 1866.

A Manual of English Literature and of the History of the English Language 2 v.

Mrs. Craik (Miss Dinah M. Mulock), † 1887.

John Halifax, Gentleman 2 v. — The Head of the Family 2 v. — A Life for a Life 2 v. — A Woman's Thoughts about Women 1 v. — Agatha's Husband 1 v. — Romantic Tales 1 v. — Domestic Stories 1 v. — Mistress and Maid 1 v. — The Ogilvies 1 v. — Lord Erlistoun 1 v. — Christian's Mistake 1 v. — Bread upon the Waters 1 v. — A Noble Life 1 v. — Olive 2 v. — Two Marriages 1 v. — Studies from Life 1 v. — Poems 1 v. — The Woman's Kingdom 2 v. — The Unkind Word, and other Stories 2 v. — A Brave Lady 2 v. — Hannah 2 v. — Fair France 1 v. — My Mother and I 1 v. — The Little Lame Prince 1 v. — Sermons out of Church 1 v. — The Laurel-Bush; Two little Tinkers 1 v. — A Legacy 2 v. — Young Mrs. Jardine 2 v. — His Little Mother, and other Tales and Sketches 1 v. — Plain Speaking 1 v. — Miss Tommy 1 v. — King Arthur 1 v.

Georgiana M. Craik (Mrs. May).

Lost and Won 1 v. — Faith Unwin's Ordeal 1 v. — Leslie Tyrrell 1 v. — Winifred's Wooing, etc. 1 v. — Mildred 1 v. — Esther Hill's Secret 2 v. — Hero Trevelyan 1 v. — Without Kith or Kin 2 v. — Only a Butterfly 1 v. — Sylvia's Choice; Theresa 2 v. — Anne Warwick 1 v. — Dorcas 2 v. — Two Women 2 v.

Georgiana M. Craik & M. C. Stirling.

Two Tales of Married Life (Hard to Bear, by Miss Craik; A True Man, by M. C. Stirling) 2 v.

Mrs. Augustus Craven, *vide* Lady Fullerton.

F. Marion Crawford (Am.).

Mr. Isaacs 1 v. — Doctor Claudius 1 v. — To Leeward 1 v. — A Roman Singer 1 v. — An American Politician 1 v. — Zoroaster 1 v. — A Tale of a Lonely Parish 2 v. — Saracinesca 2 v. — Marzio's Crucifix 1 v. — Paul Patoff 2 v. — With the Immortals 1 v. — Greifenstein 2 v. — Sant' Ilario 2 v. — A Cigarette-Maker's Romance 1 v. — Khaled 1 v. — The Witch of Prague 2 v. — The Three Fates 2 v. — Don Orsino 2 v. — The Children of the King 1 v. — Pietro Ghisleri 2 v. — Marion Darche 1 v. — Katharine Lauderdale 2 v. — The Ralstons 2 v. — Casa Braccio 2 v. — Adam Johnstone's Son 1 v. — Taquisara 2 v. — A Rose of Yesterday 1 v. — Corleone 2 v. — Via Crucis 2 v. — In the Palace of the King 2 v. — Marietta, a Maid of Venice 2 v.

S. R. Crockett.

The Raiders 2 v. — Cleg Kelly 2 v. — The Grey Man 2 v. — Love Idylls 1 v. — The Dark o' the Moon 2 v.

J. W. Cross, *vide* George Eliot's Life.

Mrs. Pender Cudlip, *vide* A. Thomas.

Miss Cummins (Am.), † 1866.

The Lamplighter 1 v. — Mabel Vaughan 1 v. — El Fureidîs 1 v. — Haunted Hearts 1 v.

Paul Cushing.

The Blacksmith of Voe 2 v.

"Daily News."

War Correspondence, 1877, by Archibald Forbes and others 3 v.

Author of "Dark."

Dark 1 v.

Richard Harding Davis (Am.).

Gallegher, etc. 1 v. — Van Bibber and Others 1 v.

Daniel De Foe, † 1731.

Robinson Crusoe 1 v.

Margaret Deland (Am.).

John Ward, Preacher 1 v.

Author of "Democracy" (Am.).

Democracy 1 v.

Author of "Demos," *vide* George Gissing.

Author of "Diary and Notes," *vide* Author of "Horace Templeton."

Charles Dickens, † 1870.

The Pickwick Club (with Portrait) 2 v. — American Notes 1 v. — Oliver Twist 1 v. — Nicholas Nickleby 2 v. — Sketches 1 v. — Martin Chuzzlewit 2 v. — A Christmas Carol; The Chimes; The Cricket on the Hearth 1 v. — Master Humphrey's Clock (Old Curiosity Shop; Barnaby Rudge, etc.) 3 v. — Pictures from Italy 1 v. — Dombey and Son 3 v. — David Copperfield 3 v. — Bleak House 4 v. — A Child's History of England (2 v. 8° M. 2,70.) — Hard Times 1 v. — Little Dorrit (with Illustrations) 4 v. — The Battle of Life; The Haunted Man 1 v. — A Tale of two Cities 2 v. — Hunted Down; The Uncommercial Traveller 1 v. — Great Expectations 2 v. — Christmas Stories, etc. 1 v. — Our Mutual Friend (with Illustrations) 4 v. — Somebody's Luggage; Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings; Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy 1 v. — Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions; Mugby Junction 1 v. — The Mystery of Edwin Drood (with Illustrations) 2 v. — The Mudfog Papers, 1 v. — The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. by his Sister-in-law and his eldest Daughter 4 v. — *Vide* also Household Words, Novels and Tales, and John Forster.

Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins.

No Thoroughfare; The Late Miss Hollingford 1 v.

Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield, † 1881.

Coningsby 1 v. — Sybil 1 v. — Contarini Fleming (with Portrait) 1 v. — Alroy 1 v. — Tancred 2 v. — Venetia 2 v. — Vivian Grey 2 v. — Henrietta Temple 1 v. — Lothair 2 v. — Endymion 2 v.

Ella Hepworth Dixon.

The Story of a Modern Woman 1 v.

W. Hepworth Dixon, † 1879.

Personal History of Lord Bacon 1 v. — The Holy Land 2 v. — New America 2 v. — Spiritual Wives 2 v. — Her Majesty's Tower 4 v. — Free Russia 2 v. — History of two Queens 6 v. — White Conquest 2 v. — *Diana, Lady Lyle* 2 v.

L. Dougall (Am.).

Beggars All 2 v.

Ménie Muriel Dowie.

A Girl in the Karpathians 1 v.

A. Conan Doyle.

The Sign of Four 1 v. — Micah Clarke 2 v. — The Captain of the Pole-Star, and other Tales 1 v. — The White Company 2 v. — A Study in Scarlet 1 v. — The Great Shadow, and Beyond the City 1 v. — The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes 2 v. — The Refugees 2 v. — The Firm of Girdlestone 2 v. — The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes 2 v. — Round the Red Lamp 1 v. — The Stark Munro Letters 1 v. — The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard 1 v. — Rodney Stone 2 v. — Uncle Bernac 1 v. — The Tragedy of the Korosko 1 v. — A Duet 1 v. — The Green Flag 1 v. — The Great Boer War 2 v. — The War in South Africa 1 v. — The Hound of the Baskervilles 1 v.

Professor Henry Drummond, † 1897.

The Greatest Thing in the World; Pax Vobiscum; The Changed Life 1 v.

Dunton, *vide* Th. Watts-Dunton.

The Earl and the Doctor.

South Sea Bubbles 1 v.

The Earl of Dufferin.

Letters from High Latitudes 1 v.

Edward B. Eastwick, † 1883.

Autobiography of Lutfullah 1 v.

Maria Edgeworth, *vide* Series for the Young, p. 29.

Mrs. Annie Edwardes.

Archie Lovell 2 v. — Steven Lawrence, Yeoman 2 v. — Ought we to visit her? 2 v. — A Vagabond Heroine 1 v. — Leah: A Woman of Fashion 2 v. — A Blue-Stocking 1 v. — Jet: Her Face or Her Fortune? 1 v. — Vivian the Beauty 1 v. — A Ball-room Repentance 2 v. — A Girton Girl 2 v. — A Playwright's Daughter, and Bertie Griffiths 1 v. — Pearl-Powder 1 v. The Adventuress 1 v.

Amelia B. Edwards, † 1892.

Barbara's History 2 v. — Miss Carew 2 v. — Hand and Glove 1 v. — Half a Million of Money 2 v. — Debenham's Vow 2 v. — In the Days of my Youth 2 v. —

Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys 1 v. — Monsieur Maurice 1 v. — A Night on the Borders of the Black Forest 1 v. — A Poetry-Book of Elder Poets 1 v. — A Thousand Miles up the Nile 2 v. — A Poetry-Book of Modern Poets 1 v. — Lord Brackenbury 2 v.

M. Betham-Edwards, *v.* **Betham.**

Edward Eggleston (Am.).

The Faith Doctor 2 v.

Barbara Elbon (Am.).

Bethesda 2 v.

George Eliot (Miss Evans — Mrs. Cross), † 1880.

Scenes of Clerical Life 2 v. — Adam Bede 2 v. — The Mill on the Floss 2 v. — Silas Marner 1 v. — Romola 2 v. — Felix Holt 2 v. — Daniel Deronda 4 v. — The Lifted Veil, and Brother Jacob 1 v. — Impressions of Theophrastus Such 1 v. — Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book 1 v. — George Eliot's Life, edited by her Husband, J. W. Cross 4 v.

Author of "Elizabeth and her German Garden."

Elizabeth and her German Garden 1 v. — The Solitary Summer 1 v. — The Benefactress 2 v.

Mrs. Frances Elliot, † 1898.

Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy 2 v. — Old Court Life in France 2 v. — The Italians 2 v. — The Diary of an Idle Woman in Sicily 1 v. — Pictures of Old Rome 1 v. — The Diary of an Idle Woman in Spain 2 v. — The Red Cardinal 1 v. — The Story of Sophia 1 v. — Diary of an Idle Woman in Constantinople 1 v. — Old Court Life in Spain 2 v. — Roman Gossip 1 v.

Author of "An Englishwoman's Love-Letters."

An Englishwoman's Love-Letters 1 v.

Henry Erroll.

An Ugly Duckling 1 v.

E. Rentoul Esler.

The Way they loved at Grimpat 1 v.

The Authors of "Essays and Reviews."

Essays and Reviews. By various Authors.

Author of "Estelle Russell."

Estelle Russell 2 v.

Elsa D'Esterre-Keeling.

Three Sisters 1 v. — A Laughing Philosopher 1 v. — The Professor's Wooing 1 v. — In Thoughtland and in Dreamland 1 v. — Orchardscroft 1 v. — Appassionata 1 v. — Old Maids and Young 2 v. — The Queen's Serf 1 v.

Author of "Euthanasia."

Euthanasia 1 v.

Juliana Horatia Ewing, † 1885.

Jackanapes; The Story of a Short Life; Daddy Darwin's Dovecot 1 v. — A Flat Iron for a Farthing 1 v. — The Brownies, and other Tales 1 v.

Author of "Expiated."

Expiated 2 v.

F. J. Fargus, *vide* **Hugh Conway.**

F. W. (Dean) Farrar.

Darkness and Dawn 3 v.

Authors of "The Fate of Fenella."

The Fate of Fenella, by 24 Authors 1 v.

Percy Fendall, *vide* **F. C. Philips.**

George Manville Fenn.

The Parson o' Dumford 2 v. — The Clerk of Portwick 2 v.

Henry Fielding, † 1754.

Tom Jones 2 v.

Five Centuries

of the English Language and Literature: John Wycliffe. — Geoffrey Chaucer. — Stephen Hawes. — Sir Thomas More. — Edmund Spenser. — Ben Jonson. — John Locke. — Thomas Gray (vol. 500, published 1860) 1 v.

George Fleming (Am.).

Kismet 1 v. — Andromeda 2 v.

Archibald Forbes, † 1900.

My Experiences of the War between France and Germany 2 v. — Soldiering and Scribbling 1 v. — Memories and Studies of War and Peace 2 v. — *Vide* also "Daily News," War Correspondence.

R. E. Forrest.

Eight Days 2 v.

Mrs. Forrester.

Viva 2 v. — Rhona 2 v. — Roy and Viola 2 v. — My Lord and My Lady 2 v. — I have Lived and Loved 2 v. — June 2 v. — Omnia Vanitas 1 v. — Although he was a Lord, and other Tales 1 v. — Corisande, and other Tales 1 v. — Once Again 2 v. — Of the World, Worldly 1 v. — Dearest 2 v. — The Light of other Days 1 v. — Too Late Repented 1 v.

John Forster, † 1876.

The Life of Charles Dickens (with Illustrations and Portraits) 6 v. — Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith 2 v.

Jessie Fothergill.

The First Violin 2 v. — Probation 2 v. — Made or Marred, and "One of Three" 1 v. — Kith and Kin 2 v. — Peril 2 v. — Borderland 2 v.

Author of "Found Dead," *vide* James Payn.

Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler.

A Double Thread 2 v. — The Farringdons 2 v.

Caroline Fox, † 1871.

Memories of Old Friends from her Journals and Letters, edited by Horace N. Pym 2 v.

Author of "Frank Fairlegh" (F. E. Smedley), † 1864.

Frank Fairlegh 2 v.

M. E. Francis.

The Duenna of a Genius 1 v.

Harold Frederic (Am.), † 1898.

Illumination 2 v. — March Hares 1 v.

Edward A. Freeman, † 1892.

The Growth of the English Constitution 1 v. — Select Historical Essays 1 v. — Sketches from French Travel 1 v.

James Anthony Froude, † 1894.

Oceana 1 v. — The Spanish Story of the Armada, and other Essays 1 v.

Lady Georgiana Fullerton, † 1885.

Ellen Middleton 1 v. — Grantley Manor 2 v. — Lady Bird 2 v. — Too Strange not to be True 2 v. — Constance Sherwood 2 v. — A Stormy Life 2 v. — Mrs. Geralds' Niece 2 v. — The Notary's Daughter 1 v. — *The Lilies of the Valley*, and The House of *Penarvan* 1 v. — *The Countess* de Bonneval 1 v. — Rose Leblanc 1 v. — Seven Stories 1 v. — The Life of Luisa de Carvajal 1 v. — A Will and a Way, and The Handkerchief at the Window 2 v. — Eliane 2 v. (by Mrs. Augustus Craven, translated by Lady Fullerton). — Laurentia 1 v.

Marguerite Gardiner, *vide* Lady Blessington.

Mrs. Gaskell, † 1865.

Mary Barton 1 v. — Ruth 2 v. — North and South 1 v. — Lizzie Leigh, and other Tales 1 v. — The Life of Charlotte Brontë 2 v. — Lois the Witch, etc. 1 v. — Sylvia's Lovers 2 v. — A Dark Night's Work 1 v. — Wives and Daughters 3 v. — Cranford 1 v. — Cousin Phillis, and other Tales 1 v.

Author of "Geraldine Hawthorne," *vide* Author of "Miss Molly."

Dorothea Gerard (Madame de Longard).

Lady Baby 2 v. — Recha 1 v. — Orthodox 1 v. — The Wrong Man 1 v. — A Spotless Reputation 1 v. — A Forgotten Sin 1 v. — One Year 1 v. — The Supreme Crime 1 v. — The Blood-Tax 1 v.

E. Gerard (Emily de Łaszowska).

A Secret Mission 1 v. — A Foreigner 2 v. — The Extermination of Love 2 v.

Agnes Giberne.

The Curate's Home 1 v.

George Gissing.

Demos. A Story of English Socialism 2 v. — New Grub Street 2 v.

Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone, † 1898.

Rome and the Newest Fashions in Religion 1 v. — Bulgarian Horrors, and Russia in Turkistan, with other Tracts 1 v. — The Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Problem, with other Tracts 1 v.

Elinor Glyn.

The Visits of Elizabeth 1 v.

Hal Godfrey (Charlotte O'Conor-Eccles).

The Rejuvenation of Miss Semaphore 1 v.

Oliver Goldsmith, † 1774.

Select Works (with Portrait) 1 v.

Edward J. Goodman.

Too Curious 1 v.

Julien Gordon (Am.).
A Diplomat's Diary 1 v.

Major-Gen. C. G. Gordon, † 1885.
His Journals at Kartoum. Introduction and Notes by A. E. Hake (with eighteen Illustrations) 2 v.

Mrs. Gore, † 1861.
Castles in the Air 1 v. — The Dean's Daughter 2 v. — Progress and Prejudice 2 v. — Mammon 2 v. — A Life's Lessons 2 v. — The Two Aristocracies 2 v. — Heckington 2 v.

Sarah Grand.
Our Manifold Nature 1 v. — Babs the Impossible 2 v.

Miss Grant.
Victor Lescar 2 v. — The Sun-Maid 2 v. — My Heart's in the Highlands 2 v. — Artiste 2 v. — Prince Hugo 2 v. — Cara Roma 2 v.

Maxwell Gray.
The Silence of Dean Maitland 2 v. — The Reproach of Annesley 2 v.

E. C. Grenville: Murray (Trois-Etoiles), † 1881.
The Member for Paris 2 v. — Young Brown 2 v. — The Boudoir Cabal 3 v. — French Pictures in English Chalk *(First Series)* 2 v. — The Russians of To-day 1 v. — French Pictures in English Chalk *(Second Series)* 2 v. — Strange Tales 1 v. — That Artful Vicar 2 v. — Six Months in the Ranks 1 v. — People I have met 1 v.

Ethel St. Clair Grimwood.
My Three Years in Manipur (with Portrait) 1 v.

W. A. Baillie Grohman.
Tyrol and the Tyrolese 1 v.

Archibald Clavering Gunter (Am.).
Mr. Barnes of New York 1 v.

F. Anstey Guthrie, *vide* Anstey.

Author of "Guy Livingstone" (George Alfred Laurence), † 1876.
Guy Livingstone 1 v. — Sword and Gown 1 v. — Barren Honour 1 v. — Border and Bastille 1 v. — Maurice Dering 1 v. — Sans Merci 2 v. — Breaking a Butterfly 2 v. — Anteros 2 v. — Hagarene 2 v.

John Habberton (Am.).
Helen's Babies & Other People's Children 1 v. — The Bowsham Puzzle 1 v. — One Tramp; Mrs. Mayburn's Twins 1 v.

H. Rider Haggard.
King Solomon's Mines 1 v. — She 2 v. — Jess 2 v. — Allan Quatermain 2 v. — The Witch's Head 2 v. — Maiwa's Revenge 1 v. — Mr. Meeson's Will 1 v. — Colonel Quaritch, V. C. 2 v. — Cleopatra 2 v. — Allan's Wife 1 v. — Beatrice 2 v. — Dawn 2 v. — Montezuma's Daughter 2 v. — The People of the Mist 2 v. — Joan Haste 2 v. — Heart of the World 2 v. — The Wizard 1 v. — Doctor Therne 1 v. — Swallow 2 v. — Black Heart and White Heart, and Elissa 1 v. — Lysbeth 2 v. — A Winter Pilgrimage 2 v.

H. Rider Haggard & Andrew Lang.
The World's Desire 2 v.

A. E. Hake, *vide* Gen. Gordon.

Mrs. S. C. Hall, † 1881.
Can Wrong be Right? 1 v. — Marian 2 v.

Philip Gilbert Hamerton, † 1894.
Marmorne 1 v. — French and English 2 v.

Miss Iza Hardy, *vide* Author of "Not Easily Jealous."

Thomas Hardy.
The Hand of Ethelberta 2 v. — Far from the Madding Crowd 2 v. — The Return of the Native 2 v. — The Trumpet-Major 2 v. — A Laodicean 2 v. — Two on a Tower 2 v. — A Pair of Blue Eyes 2 v. — A Group of Noble Dames 1 v. — Tess of the D'Urbervilles 2 v. — Life's Little Ironies 1 v. — Jude the Obscure 2 v.

Beatrice Harraden.
Ships that pass in the Night 1 v. — In Varying Moods 1 v. — Hilda Strafford, and The Remittance Man 1 v. — The Fowler 2 v.

Agnes Harrison.
Martin's Vineyard 1 v.

Bret Harte (Am.), † 1902.
Prose and Poetry (Tales of the Argonauts: — The Luck of Roaring Camp; The Outcasts of Poker Flat, etc. — Spanish and American Legends; Condensed Novels; Civic and Character Sketches; Poems) 2 v. — Idyls of the Foothills 1 v. — Gabriel Conroy 2 v. — Two Men of Sandy Bar 1 v. — Thankful Blossom, and other Tales 1 v. — The Story of a Mine 1 v. — Drift from Two

Shores 1 v. — An Heiress of Red Dog, and other Sketches 1 v. — The Twins of Table Mountain, and other Tales 1 v. — Jeff Briggs's Love Story, and other Tales 1 v. — Flip, and other Stories 1 v. — On the Frontier 1 v. — By Shore and Sedge 1 v. — Maruja 1 v. — Snow-bound at Eagle's, and Devil's Ford 1 v. — The Crusade of the "Excelsior" 1 v. — A Millionaire of Rough-and-Ready, and other Tales 1 v. — Captain Jim's Friend, and the Argonauts of North Liberty 1 v. — Cressy 1 v. — The Heritage of Dedlow Marsh, and other Tales 1 v. — A Waif of the Plains 1 v. — A Ward of the Golden Gate 1 v. — A Sappho of Green Springs, and other Tales 1 v. — A First Family of Tasajara 1 v. — Colonel Starbottle's Client, and some other People 1 v. — Susy 1 v. — Sally Dows, etc. 1 v. — A Protégée of Jack Hamlin's, etc. 1 v. — The Bell-Ringer of Angel's, etc. 1 v. — Clarence 1 v. — In a Hollow of the Hills, and The Devotion of Enriquez 1 v. — The Ancestors of Peter Atherly, etc. 1 v. — Three Partners 1 v. — Tales of Trail and Town 1 v. — Stories in Light and Shadow 1 v. — Mr. Jack Hamlin's Mediation, and other Stories 1 v. — From Sand-Hill to Pine 1 v. — Under the Redwoods 1 v. — On the Old Trail 1 v.

Sir Henry Havelock, *vide* Rev. W. Brock.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (Am.), † 1864.

The Scarlet Letter 1 v. — Transformation (The Marble Faun) 2 v. — Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne 2 v.

Mrs. Hector, *vide* Mrs. Alexander.

Author of "The Heir of Redclyffe," *vide* Charlotte M. Yonge.

Sir Arthur Helps, † 1875.

Friends in Council 2 v. — Ivan de Biron 2 v.

Mrs. Felicia Hemans, † 1835.

Select Poetical Works 1 v.

Maurice Hewlett.

The Forest Lovers 1 v. — Little Novels of Italy 1 v. — The Life and Death of Richard Yea-and-Nay 2 v. — New Canterbury Tales 1 v.

Robert Hichens.

Flames 2 v. — The Slave 2 v.

Admiral Hobart Pasha, † 1886.

Sketches from my Life 1 v.

John Oliver Hobbes.

The Gods, Some Mortals and Lord Wickenham 1 v. — The Serious Wooing 1 v.

Mrs. Cashel Hoey.

A Golden Sorrow 2 v. — Out of Court 2 v.

Annie E. Holdsworth.

The Years that the Locust hath Eaten 1 v. — The Gods Arrive 1 v. — The Valley of the Great Shadow 1 v. — Great Lowlands 1 v.

Holme Lee, *vide* Harriet Parr.

Oliver Wendell Holmes (Am.), † 1894.

The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table 1 v. — The Professor at the Breakfast-Table 1 v. — The Poet at the Breakfast-Table 1 v. — Over the Teacups 1 v.

Anthony Hope (Hawkins).

Mr. Witt's Widow 1 v. — A Change of Air 1 v. — Half a Hero 1 v. — The Indiscretion of the Duchess 1 v. — The God in the Car 1 v. — The Chronicles of Count Antonio 1 v. — Comedies of Courtship 1 v. — The Heart of Princess Osra 1 v. — Phroso 2 v. — Simon Dale 2 v. — Rupert of Hentzau 1 v. — The King's Mirror 2 v. — Quisanté 1 v. — Tristram of Blent 2 v.

Tighe Hopkins.

An Idler in Old France 1 v. — The Man in the Iron Mask 1 v. — The Dungeons of Old Paris 1 v. — The Silent Gate 1 v.

Author of "Horace Templeton."

Diary and Notes 1 v.

Ernest William Hornung.

A Bride from the Bush 1 v. — Under Two Skies 1 v. — Tiny Luttrell 1 v. — The Boss of Taroomba 1 v. — My Lord Duke 1 v. — Young Blood 1 v. — Some Persons Unknown 1 v. — The Amateur Cracksman 1 v. — The Rogue's March 1 v. — The Belle of Toorak 1 v. — Peccavi 1 v. — The Black Mask 1 v. — The Shadow of the Rope 1 v.

"Household Words."

Conducted by Charles Dickens. 1851-56. 36 v. — Novels and Tales reprinted from Household Words by Charles Dickens. 1856-59. 11 v.

Mrs. Houstoun, *vide* "Recommended to Mercy."

Author of "How to be Happy though Married."

How to be Happy though Married 1 v.

Blanche Willis Howard (Am.), † 1899.

One Summer 1 v. — Aunt Serena 1 v. — Guenn 2 v. — Tony, the Maid, etc. 1 v. — The Open Door 2 v.

Blanche Willis Howard, † 1899, & William Sharp.

A Fellowe and His Wife 1 v.

William Dean Howells (Am.).

A Foregone Conclusion 1 v. — The Lady of the Aroostook 1 v. — A Modern Instance 2 v. — The Undiscovered Country 1 v. — Venetian Life (with Portrait) 1 v. — Italian Journeys 1 v. — A Chance Acquaintance 1 v. — Their Wedding Journey 1 v. — A Fearful Responsibility, and Tonelli's Marriage 1 v. — A Woman's Reason 2 v. — Dr. Breen's Practice 1 v. — The Rise of Silas Lapham 2 v. — A Pair of Patient Lovers 1 v.

Thomas Hughes, † 1898.

Tom Brown's School-Days 1 v.

Mrs. Hungerford (Mrs. Argles), † 1897.

Molly Bawn 2 v. — Mrs. Geoffrey 2 v. — Faith and Unfaith 2 v. — Portia 2 v. — Loÿs, Lord Berresford, and other Tales 1 v. — Her First Appearance, and other Tales 1 v. — Phyllis 2 v. — Rossmoyne 2 v. — Doris 2 v. — A Maiden all Forlorn, etc. 1 v. — A Passive Crime, and other Stories 1 v. — Green Pleasure and Grey Grief 2 v. — A Mental Struggle 2 v. — Her Week's Amusement, and Ugly Barrington 1 v. — Lady Branksmere 2 v. — Lady Valworth's Diamonds 1 v. — A Modern Circe 2 v. — Marvel 2 v. — The Hon. Mrs. Vereker 1 v. — Under-Currents 2 v. — In Durance Vile, etc. 1 v. — A Troublesome Girl, and other Stories 1 v. — A Life's Remorse 2 v. — A Born Coquette 2 v. — The Duchess 1 v. — Lady Verner's Flight 1 v. — A Conquering Heroine, and "When in Doubt" 1 v. — Nora Creina 2 v. — A Mad Prank, and other Stories 1 v. — The Hoyden 2 v. — The Red House Mystery 1 v. — An Unsatisfactory Lover 1 v. — Peter's Wife 2 v. — The Three Graces 1 v. — A Tug of War 1 v. — The Professor's Experiment 2 v. — A Point of Conscience 2 v. — A Lonely Girl 1 v. — Lovice 1 v. — The Coming of Chloe 1 v.

Mrs. Hunt, *vide* Averil Beaumont.

Violet Hunt.

The Human Interest 1 v.

Jean Ingelow, † 1897.

Off the Skelligs 3 v. — Poems 2 v. — Fated to be Free 2 v. — Sarah de Berenger 2 v. — Don John 2 v.

The Hon. Lady Inglis.

The Siege of Lucknow 1 v.

John H. Ingram, *vide* E. A. Poe.

Iota, *vide* Mrs. Mannington Caffyn.

Washington Irving (Am.), † 1859.

The Sketch Book (with Portrait) 1 v. — The Life of Mahomet 1 v. — Lives of the Successors of Mahomet 1 v. — Oliver Goldsmith 1 v. — Chronicles of Wolfert's Roost 1 v. — Life of George Washington 5 v.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (H. H.) (Am.), † 1885.

Ramona 2 v.

W. W. Jacobs.

Many Cargoes 1 v. — The Skipper's Wooing, and The Brown Man's Servant 1 v. — Sea Urchins 1 v. — A Master of Craft 1 v. — Light Freights 1 v. — At Sunwich Port 1 v.

Charles T. C. James.

Holy Wedlock 1 v.

G. P. R. James, † 1860.

Morley Ernstein (with Portrait) 1 v. — Forest Days 1 v. — The False Heir 1 v. — Arabella Stuart 1 v. — Rose d'Albret 1 v. — Arrah Neil 1 v. — Agincourt 1 v. — The Smuggler 1 v. — The Step-Mother 2 v. — Beauchamp 1 v. — Heidelberg 1 v. — The Gipsy 1 v. — The Castle of Ehrenstein 1 v. — Darnley 1 v. — Russell 2 v. — The Convict 2 v. — Sir Theodore Broughton 2 v.

Henry James (Am.).

The American 2 v. — The Europeans 1 v. — Daisy Miller; An International Episode; Four Meetings 1 v. — Roderick Hudson 2 v. — The Madonna of the Future, etc. 1 v. — Eugene Pickering, etc 1 v. — Confidence 1 v. — Washing-

ton Square, etc. 2 v. — The Portrait of a Lady 3 v. — Foreign Parts 1 v. — French Poets and Novelists 1 v. — The Siege of London; The Point of View; A Passionate Pilgrim 1 v. — Portraits of Places 1 v. — A Little Tour in France 1 v.

J. Cordy Jeaffreson.

A Book about Doctors 2 v. — A Woman in spite of Herself 2 v. — The Real Lord Byron 3 v.

Mrs. Charles Jenkin, † 1885.

"Who Breaks—Pays" 1 v. — Skirmishing 1 v. — Once and Again 2 v. — Two French Marriages 2 v. — Within an Ace 1 v. — Jupiter's Daughters 1 v.

Edward Jenkins.

Ginx's Baby, his Birth and other Misfortunes; Lord Bantam 2 v.

Author of "Jennie of 'The Prince's,'" *vide* B. H. Buxton.

Jerome K. Jerome.

The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow 1 v. — Diary of a Pilgrimage, and Six Essays 1 v. — Novel Notes 1 v. — Sketches in Lavender, Blue and Green 1 v. — The Second Thoughts of an Idle Fellow 1 v. — Three Men on the Bummel 1 v.

Douglas Jerrold, † 1857.

History of St. Giles and St. James 2 v. — Men of Character 2 v.

Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman," *vide* Mrs. Craik.

Johnny Ludlow, *vide* Mrs. Henry Wood.

Samuel Johnson, † 1784.

Lives of the English Poets 2 v.

Emily Jolly.

Colonel Dacre 2 v.

Author of "Joshua Davidson," *vide* Mrs. E. Lynn Linton.

Miss Julia Kavanagh, † 1877.

Nathalie 2 v. — Daisy Burns 2 v. — Grace Lee 2 v. — Rachel Gray 1 v. — Adèle 3 v. — A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies 2 v. — Seven Years, and other Tales 2 v. — French Women of Letters 1 v. — *English* Women of Letters 1 v. — *Queen Mab* 2 v. — Beatrice 2 v. — Sybil's Second Love 2 v. — Dora 2 v. — Silvia 2 v. — Bessie 2 v. — John Dorrien 3 v. — Two Lilies 2 v. — Forget-me-nots 2 v. — *Vide* also Series for the Young, p. 29.

Annie Keary, † 1879.

Oldbury 2 v. — Castle Daly 2 v.

D'Esterre-Keeling, *vide* Esterre.

Thomas a Kempis.

The Imitation of Christ. Translated from the Latin by W. Benham, B.D. 1 v.

Richard B. Kimball (Am.), †

Saint Leger 1 v. — Romance of Student Life Abroad 1 v. — Undercurrents 1 v. — Was he Successful? 1 v. — To-Day in New York 1 v.

Alexander William Kinglake, † 1891.

Eothen 1 v. — The Invasion of the Crimea 14 v.

Charles Kingsley, † 1875.

Yeast 1 v. — Westward ho! 2 v. — Two Years ago 2 v. — Hypatia 2 v. — Alton Locke 1 v. — Hereward the Wake 2 v. — At Last 2 v. — His Letters and Memories of his Life, edited by his Wife 2 v.

Henry Kingsley, † 1876.

Ravenshoe 2 v. — Austin Elliot 1 v. — Geoffry Hamlyn 2 v. — The Hillyars and the Burtons 2 v. — Leighton Court 1 v. — Valentin 1 v. — Oakshott Castle 1 v. — Reginald Hetherege 2 v. — The Grange Garden 2 v.

Albert Kinross.

An Opera and Lady Grasmere 1 v.

Rudyard Kipling.

Plain Tales from the Hills 1 v. — The Second Jungle Book 1 v. — The Seven Seas 1 v. — "Captains Courageous" 1 v. — The Day's Work 1 v. — A Fleet in Being 1 v. — Stalky & Co. 1 v. — From Sea to Sea 2 v. — The City of Dreadful Night 1 v. — Kim 1 v.

May Laffan.

Flitters, Tatters, and the Counsellor, etc. 1 v.

Charles Lamb, † 1834.

The Essays of Elia and Eliana 1 v.

Mary Langdon (Am.).

Ida May 1 v.

Author of "The Last of the Cavaliers" (Miss Piddington).
The Last of the Cavaliers 2 v. — The Gain of a Loss 2 v.

Mme de Laszowska, *vide* E. Gerard.

The Hon. Emily Lawless.
Hurrish 1 v.

George Alfred Laurence, *vide* Author of "Guy Livingstone."

"Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands," *vide* Victoria R. I.

Holme Lee, † 1900, *vide* Harriet Parr.

J. S. Le Fanu, † 1873.
Uncle Silas 2 v. — Guy Deverell 2 v.

Mark Lemon, † 1870.
Wait for the End 2 v. — Loved at Last 2 v. — Falkner Lyle 2 v. — Leyton Hall, and other Tales 2 v. — Golden Fetters 2 v.

Author of "The Letters of Her Mother to Elizabeth."
The Letters of Her Mother to Elizabeth 1 v.

Charles Lever, † 1872.
The O'Donoghue 1 v. — The Knight of Gwynne 3 v. — Arthur O'Leary 2 v. — Harry Lorrequer 2 v. — Charles O'Malley 3 v. — Tom Burke of "Ours" 3 v. — Jack Hinton 2 v. — The Daltons 4 v. — The Dodd Family Abroad 3 v. — The Martins of Cro' Martin 3 v. — The Fortunes of Glencore 2 v. — Roland Cashel 3 v. — Davenport Dunn 3 v. — Confessions of Con Cregan 2 v. — One of Them 2 v. — Maurice Tiernay 2 v. — Sir Jasper Carew 2 v. — Barrington 2 v. — A Day's Ride 2 v. — Luttrell of Arran 2 v. — Tony Butler 2 v. — Sir Brook Fossbrooke 2 v. — The Bramleighs of Bishop's Folly 2 v. — A Rent in a Cloud 1 v. — That Boy of Norcott's 1 v. — St. Patrick's Eve; Paul Gosslett's Confessions 1 v. — Lord Kilgobbin 2 v.

S. Levett-Yeats.
The Honour of Savelli 1 v. — The Chevalier d'Auriac 1 v. — The Traitor's Way 1 v.

G. H. Lewes, † 1878.
Ranthorpe 1 v. — The Physiology of Common Life 2 v. — On Actors and the Art of Acting 1 v.

Mrs. E. Lynn Linton, † 1898.
The true History of Joshua Davidson 1 v. — Patricia Kemball 2 v. — The Atonement of Leam Dundas 2 v. — The World well Lost 2 v. — Under which Lord? 2 v. — With a Silken Thread, and other Stories 1 v. — Todhunters' at Loanin' Head, and other Stories 1 v. — "My Love!" 2 v. — The Girl of the Period, and other Social Essays 1 v. — Ione 2 v.

Laurence W. M. Lockhart, † 1882.
Mine is Thine 2 v.

Lord Augustus Loftus.
Diplomatic Reminiscences 1837-1862 (with Portrait) 2 v.

Mme de Longard, *vide* D. Gerard.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Am.), † 1882.
Poetical Works (with Portrait) 3 v. — The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri 3 v. — The New-England Tragedies 1 v. — The Divine Tragedy 1 v. — Flower-de-Luce, and Three Books of Song 1 v. — The Masque of Pandora, and other Poems 1 v.

Margaret Lonsdale.
Sister Dora (with a Portrait of Sister Dora) 1 v.

Author of "A Lost Battle."
A Lost Battle 2 v.

Sir John Lubbock, Bart.
The Pleasures of Life 1 v. — The Beauties of Nature (with Illustrations) 1 v. — The Use of Life 1 v. — Scenery of Switzerland (with Illustrations) 2 v.

"Lutfullah," *vide* Eastwick.

Edna Lyall.
We Two 2 v. — Donovan 2 v. — In the Golden Days 2 v. — Knight-Errant 2 v. — Won by Waiting 2 v. — Wayfaring Men 2 v — Hope the Hermit 2 v. — Doreen 2 v. — In Spite of All 2 v. — The Hinderers 1 v.

Lord Lytton, *vide* E. Bulwer.

Robert Lord Lytton (Owen Meredith), † 1891.
Poems 2 v. — Fables in Song 2 v.

Maarten Maartens.
The Sin of Joost Avelingh 1 v. — An Old Maid's Love 2 v. — God's Fool 2 v. — The Greater Glory 2 v. — My Lady Nobody 2 v. — Her Memory 1 v. — Some Women I have known 1 v.

Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay, † 1859.
History of England (with Portrait) 10 v. — Critical and Historical Essays 5 v. — Lays of Ancient Rome 1 v. — Speeches 2 v. — Biographical Essays 1 v. — William Pitt, Atterbury 1 v. — (See also Trevelyan).

Justin McCarthy.
The Waterdale Neighbours 2 v. — Dear Lady Disdain 2 v. — Miss Misanthrope 2 v. — A History of our own Times 5 v. — Donna Quixote 2 v. — A short History of our own Times 2 v. — A History of the Four Georges vols. 1 & 2. — A History of our own Times vols. 6 & 7 (supplemental). — A History of the Four Georges and of William IV. Vols. 3, 4 & 5 (supplemental).

George Mac Donald.
Alec Forbes of Howglen 2 v. — Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood 2 v. — David Elginbrod 2 v. — The Vicar's Daughter 2 v. — Malcolm 2 v. — St. George and St. Michael 2 v. — The Marquis of Lossie 2 v. — Sir Gibbie 2 v. — Mary Marston 2 v. — The Gifts of the Child Christ, and other Tales 1 v. — The Princess and Curdie 1 v.

Mrs. Mackarness, † 1881.
Sunbeam Stories 1 v. — A Peerless Wife 2 v. — A Mingled Yarn 2 v.

Eric Mackay, † 1898.
Love Letters of a Violinist, and other Poems 1 v.

Charles McKnight (Am.).
Old Fort Duquesne 2 v.

Ian Maclaren.
Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush 1 v. — The Days of Auld Langsyne 1 v.

***Norman* Macleod, † 1872.**
The Old Lieutenant and his Son 1 v.

James Macpherson, † 1696, *vide* Ossian.

Mrs. Macquoid.
Patty 2 v. — Miriam's Marriage 2 v. — Pictures across the Channel 2 v. — Too Soon 1 v. — My Story 2 v. — Diane 2 v. — Beside the River 2 v. — A Faithful Lover 2 v.

Author of "Mademoiselle Mori" (Miss Roberts).
Mademoiselle Mori 2 v. — Denise 1 v. — Madame Fontenoy 1 v. — On the Edge of the Storm 1 v. — The Atelier du Lys 2 v. — In the Olden Time 2 v.

Lord Mahon, *vide* Stanhope.

E. S. Maine.
Scarscliff Rocks 2 v.

Sir Edward Malet, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.
Shifting Scenes 1 v.

Lucas Malet.
Colonel Enderby's Wife 2 v. — The History of Sir Richard Calmady 3 v.

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Memoirs of an Ex-Minister 3 v.

Mary E. Mann.
A Winter's Tale 1 v. — The Cedar Star 1 v.

Robert Blachford Mansfield.
The Log of the Water Lily 1 v.

Mark Twain, *vide* Twain.

Author of "Marmorne," *vide* P. G. Hamerton.

Capt. Marryat, † 1848.
Jacob Faithful (with Portrait) 1 v. — Percival Keene 1 v. — Peter Simple 1 v. — Japhet in Search of a Father 1 v. — Monsieur Violet 1 v. — The Settlers in Canada 1 v. — The Mission 1 v. — The Privateer's-Man 1 v. — The Children of the New-Forest 1 v. — Valerie 1 v. — Mr. Midshipman Easy 1 v. — The King's Own 1 v.

Florence Marryat, † 1899.
Love's Conflict 2 v. — For Ever and Ever 2 v. — The Confessions of Gerald Estcourt 2 v. — Nelly Brooke 2 v. — Véronique 2 v. — Petronel 2 v. — Her Lord and Master 2 v. — The Prey of the Gods 1 v. — Life and Letters of Captain Marryat 1 v. — Mad Dumaresq 2 v. —

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Mrs. Anne Marsh (Caldwell), † 1874.

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Mrs. Emma Marshall, † 1899.

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George du Maurier, † 1896.

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Mrs. Maxwell, *vide* Miss Braddon.

Author of "Mehalah," *vide* Baring-Gould.

George J. Whyte Melville, † 1878.

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The Money-Spinner, etc. 1 v.

James Milne.

The Epistles of Atkins 1 v.

John Milton, † 1674.

Poetical Works 1 v.

Author of "Miss Molly."

Geraldine Hawthorne 1 v.

Author of "Molly Bawn," *vide* **Mrs. Hungerford.**

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George Moore.

Celibates 1 v. — Evelyn Innes 2 v. — Sister Teresa 2 v.

Thomas Moore, † 1852.

Poetical Works (with Portrait) 5 v.

Lady Morgan, † 1859.

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Henry Morley, † 1894.

Of English Literature in the Reign of *Victoria. With Facsimiles of the Signatures of Authors in the* Tauchnitz Edition *(v. 2000, published* 1881) 1 v.

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Arthur Morrison.

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Dr. J. H. Newman (Cardinal Newman), † 1890.

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Mrs. Nicholls, *vide* **Currer Bell.**

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Author of "No Church" (F. Robinson).

No Church 2 v. — Owen: — a Waif 2 v.

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The Octopus 2 v.

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Hon. Mrs. Norton, † 1877.

Stuart of Dunleath 2 v. — Lost and Saved 2 v. — Old Sir Douglas 2 v.

Author of "Not Easily Jealous" (Miss Iza Hardy).

Not Easily Jealous 2 v.

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Laurence Oliphant, † 1888.

Altiora Peto 2 v. — Masollam 2 v.

Mrs. Oliphant, † 1897.

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Author of "The Outcasts," *vide* "Roy Tellet."

Gilbert Parker.

The Battle of the Strong 2 v.

Harriet Parr (Holme Lee), † 1900.

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Mrs. Parr.

Dorothy Fox 1 v. — The Prescotts of Pamphillon 2 v. — The Gosau Smithy, etc. 1 v. — Robin 2 v. — Loyalty George 2 v.

George Paston.

A Study in Prejudices 1 v. — A Fair Deceiver 1 v.

Mrs. Paul, *vide* Author of "Still Waters."

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Paul Ferroll 1 v. — Year after Year

1 v. — Why Paul Ferroll killed his Wife 1 v.

James Payn, † 1898.

Found Dead 1 v. — Gwendoline's Harvest 1 v. — Like Father, like Son 2 v. — Not Wooed, but Won 2 v. — Cecil's Tryst 1 v. — A Woman's Vengeance 2 v. — Murphy's Master 1 v. — In the Heart of a Hill, and other Stories 1 v. — At Her Mercy 2 v. — The Best of Husbands 2 v. — Walter's Word 2 v. — Halves 2 v. — Fallen Fortunes 2 v. — What He cost Her 2 v. — By Proxy 2 v. — Less Black than we're Painted 2 v. — Under one Roof 2 v. — High Spirits 1 v. — High Spirits *(Second Series)* 1 v. — A Confidential Agent 2 v. — From Exile 2 v. — A Grape from a Thorn 2 v. — Some Private Views 1 v. — For Cash Only 2 v. — Kit: A Memory 2 v. — The Canon's Ward (with Portrait) 2 v. — Some Literary Recollections 1 v. — The Talk of the Town 1 v. — The Luck of the Darrells 2 v. — The Heir of the Ages 2 v. — Holiday Tasks 1 v. — Glow-Worm Tales *(First Series)* 1 v. — Glow-Worm Tales *(Second Series)* 1 v. — A Prince of the Blood 2 v. — The Mystery of Mirbridge 2 v. — The Burnt Million 2 v. — The Word and the Will 2 v. — Sunny Stories, and some Shady Ones 1 v. — A Modern Dick Whittington 2 v. — A Stumble on the Threshold 2 v. — A Trying Patient 1 v. — Gleams of Memory, and The Eavesdropper 1 v. — In Market Overt 1 v. — The Disappearance of George Driffell, and other Tales 1 v. — Another's Burden etc. 1 v. — The Backwater of Life, or Essays of a Literary Veteran 1 v.

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Miss Piddington, *vide* Author of "The Last of the Cavaliers."

Edgar Allan Poe (Am.), † 1849.

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Alexander Pope, † 1744.

Select Poetical Works (with Portrait) 1 v.

Miss E. Frances Poynter.

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Mrs. Campbell Praed.

Zéro 1 v. — Affinities 1 v. — The Head Station 2 v.

Mrs. E. Prentiss (Am.), † 1878.

Stepping Heavenward 1 v.

The Prince Consort, † 1861.

His Principal Speeches and Addresses (with Portrait) 1 v.

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Hor. N. Pym, *vide* **Caroline Fox.**

Q (A. T. Quiller-Couch).
Noughts and Crosses 1 v. — I Saw Three Ships 1 v. — Dead Man's Rock 1 v. — Ia and other Tales 1 v. — The Ship of Stars 1 v.

H. M. the Queen, *vide* **Victoria R. I.**

W. Fraser Rae.
Westward by Rail 1 v. — Miss Bayle's Romance 2 v. — The Business of Travel 1 v.

C. E. Raimond (Miss Robins).
The Open Question 2 v.

Author of "The Rajah's Heir."
The Rajah's Heir 2 v.

Charles Reade, † 1884.
"It is never too late to mend" 2 v. — "Love me little, love me long" 1 v. — The Cloister and the Hearth 2 v. — Hard Cash 3 v. — Put Yourself in his Place 2 v. — A Terrible Temptation 2 v. — Peg Woffington 1 v. — Christie Johnstone 1 v. — A Simpleton 2 v. — The Wandering Heir 1 v. — A Woman-Hater 2 v. — Readiana 1 v. — Singleheart and Doubleface 1 v.

Author of "Recommended to Mercy" (Mrs. Houstoun).
"Recommended to Mercy" 2 v. — Zoe's "Brand" 2 v.

Mrs. Reeves, *vide* **Helen Mathers.**

Grace Rhys.
Mary Dominic 1 v. — The Wooing of Sheila 1 v.

James Rice, *vide* **Walter Besant.**

Alfred Bate Richards, † 1876.
So very Human 3 v.

S. Richardson, † 1761.
Clarissa Harlowe 4 v.

Mrs. Riddell (F. G. Trafford).
George Geith of Fen Court 2 v. — Maxwell Drewitt 2 v. — The Race for Wealth 2 v. — Far above Rubies 2 v. — The Earl's Promise 2 v. — Mortomley's Estate 2 v.

Mrs. Anne Thackeray Ritchie, *vide* **Miss Thackeray.**

Miss Roberts, *vide* **Author of "Mademoiselle Mori."**

Rev. Frederick W. Robertson, † 1853.
Sermons 4 v.

Miss Robins, *vide* **Raimond.**

F. Robinson, *vide* **Author of "No Church."**

Charles H. Ross.
The Pretty Widow 1 v. — A London Romance 2 v.

Martin Ross, *vide* **Somerville.**

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, † 1882.
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"Roy Tellet."
The Outcasts 1 v. — A Draught of Lethe 1 v. — Pastor and Prelate 2 v.

J. Ruffini, † 1881.
Lavinia 2 v. — Doctor Antonio 1 v. — Lorenzo Benoni 1 v. — Vincenzo 2 v. — A Quiet Nook in the Jura 1 v. — The Paragreens on a Visit to Paris 1 v. — Carlino, and other Stories 1 v.

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George W. E. Russell.
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George Augustus Sala, † 1895.
The Seven Sons of Mammon 2 v.

John Saunders.
Israel Mort, Overman 2 v. — The Shipowner's Daughter 2 v. — A Noble Wife 2 v.

Katherine Saunders (Mrs. Cooper).
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Olive Schreiner.

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland 1 v.

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Prof. J. R. Seeley, M.A., † 1895.

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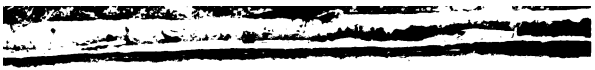
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